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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PAUL TILLICH'S  
UNDERSTANDING OF GRACE FOR PREACHING

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The School of Theology at Claremont

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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by  
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DEDICATED TO

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The Congregation of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church,  
Humber Heights, Toronto, Canada.

To those who provided me with a full Sabbatical  
year, making possible a sustained period of reflection  
on the meaning of the Christian faith and ministry, and  
making possible the study of this dissertation.

## PREFACE

I have undertaken this dissertation on grace because it became obvious during my Sabbatical year that this was the greatest need in my understanding of preaching and probably of the Christian faith. I seldom, if ever, used the word grace. Grace had become meaningless and unintelligible for me.

It was during my preaching assignment before the class under the leadership of Prof. K. Morgan Edwards that the more insightful students recognized the serious lack of a clear articulation of grace. Naturally I didn't take their criticism graciously. I was defensive of my presentation. After all, that sermon was important to my thinking. But as I began to reflect on the class criticism, and to lay it alongside what some of my most alert laymen had been saying about my preaching, I saw that I was guilty. I read these words somewhere: "We do not really trust God in our preaching." That was I. I worked hard at preparing sermons. I wanted to worship God with my mind. I did not want to insult the intelligence of the listeners in my congregation. But I prepared my sermons in a way that said underneath it all, "You do not trust God's grace, really."

This is clear to me now. How could it be otherwise when Prof. K. Morgan Edwards said repeatedly in the

homiletics classes: "There are three essentials in every sermon, judgment, grace and obedience." Now that this is clear to me, I will not do any less preparation, but I will trust God's grace to do what only he can do.

Rather than study grace in the thinking of several theologians or preachers, it seemed more practical to study seriously from the works of one writer. I considered Barth, Forsyth, and Thielicke as possible subjects for such a study. Grace is important in all their works. Paul Tillich was my personal choice, not because I think he is nearer the truth than the others--I am not sure he is. I selected Tillich because his phrase, "accepting the unacceptable" as an interpretation of "justification by grace through faith" captured my imagination. Was this a modern interpretation of what Paul meant by grace? Or was it a perversion? Did it fall short? In any event, the phrase was a meaningful one that spoke personally to my condition.

I have undertaken the study of grace because of its centrality to the Christian faith. I believe, as Tillich puts it: "The Christian message above all else is a message of grace." I wanted to know more about the heart beat of God's gracious action in Jesus Christ.

I am especially indebted to Prof. K. Morgan Edwards for his leadership and friendship during my

studies at Claremont. I have not been disappointed, either in his preaching or his teaching. I wish to express my thanks to the other member of my dissertation committee, Professor E. L. Titus, for his help and the warmth of his friendship. I will always look back on this Sabbatical year as a time when the centrality of grace was firmly established in my thinking and hopefully, in my life.



## INTRODUCTION

Paul Tillich wrote: "The Christian message above all else is a message of grace."<sup>1</sup> In the first chapter we will consider Tillich's theological understanding of grace under three headings--salvation, personality and obedience. I have selected salvation, personality and obedience, because they are central to the message of the gospel and to the Christian life. Each of the three appears prominently in the writings of Tillich. That this is true has greatly enhanced the study of grace as it relates to these headings. Of course, they overlap in Tillich and in the Bible. The outline is to facilitate a careful scrutiny of grace in each of these three areas.

Salvation comes through God's grace. Man's estrangement is overcome and we are united with God. We will then consider Tillich's theology of grace and personality. "Accept your acceptance" is the essence of this chapter. The last consideration will be the relationship between grace and obedience. The key expression for this section is "New Being precedes new action." Tillich would have agreed with Martin Luther when he wrote: "For being comes before doing, but being-acted-upon comes even before

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Tillich, Morality and Beyond (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1963), p. 62.

being."<sup>2</sup> Grace makes the fulfillment of the law possible, however fragmentarily.

The second chapter gathers together the ways in which Tillich preached grace. A study of his three books of sermons will show how he preached the relationship between grace and salvation, grace and personality, and grace and obedience.

Chapter three will be normative for this dissertation's understanding of grace. An overview of the Biblical doctrine of grace will provide the backdrop for a more intense study of grace in Paul's letter to the Romans, chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter four will be an appraisal of Tillich's understanding of grace. I will deal with three areas where I take issue with Tillich's view of grace.

Chapter five will deal with the implications of grace for preaching as I experience it personally.

We will keep in mind throughout this paper Tillich's carefully chosen phrase, the "reality of grace." Tillich used this phrase to prevent falling into a mere intellectualizing about grace. The reality of grace is in the total being of Jesus Christ, and not merely in language. That is, the reality of grace and not the speaking

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<sup>2</sup>Martin Luther, Lectures on Romans (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), p. 321.

about grace is the source of Christianity."<sup>3</sup> The words of the Bible are an expression of the reality of grace. Preaching is to be an expression of the reality of grace. The reality of grace precedes all speaking about grace. But to be grasped by the Spirit is to be drawn into the reality and the life of a Gestalt of grace.

This paper has been more than a mere academic exercise about Paul Tillich's theology of grace for me. It has been an experience in the reality of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER I

### TILLICH'S THEOLOGY OF GRACE

#### A. GRACE AND SALVATION

For Tillich grace "is an act of God which is in no way dependent on man, an act in which he accepts him who is unacceptable."<sup>1</sup> Tillich writes that the term grace "qualifies all relations between God and man in such a way that they are freely inaugurated by God and in no way dependent on anything the creature does or desires."<sup>2</sup>

Tillich calls this the "Protestant principle." Protestantism stands or falls on the principle of justification by grace through faith.

It should be regarded as the Protestant principle that, in relation to God, God alone can act and that no human claim, especially no religious claim, no intellectual or moral or devotional 'work,' can reunite us with him.<sup>3</sup>

The very term "grace" indicates that it is not a product of any act of good will on the part of him who receives it, but that it is given gratuitously, without merit on his side.<sup>4</sup>

God's grace is one, but it is seen in three major manifestations. There is the grace of God in creation.

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), II, 178.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., I, 285.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., III, 223f.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., III, 274.

This grace "provides participation to every individual being." There is the Providential grace of God (preventive grace). It prepares for the acceptance of saving grace through the processes of nature and history. The third manifestation of God's grace is saving grace. It "accepts that which is unacceptable."<sup>5</sup> This is the most important interpretative phrase Tillich uses to give content to the reality of grace.

Tillich is confident that to "accept oneself as accepted in spite of being unacceptable . . . is the genuine meaning of the Pauline-Lutheran doctrine of 'justification by faith.'" Tillich goes on to point out that the modern day idea of acceptance in psychotherapy

has received the attention and gained the significance which in the Reformation period was to be seen in phrases like "forgiveness of sins" or "justification through faith."<sup>6</sup>

But for Tillich "justification by faith" is "a doctrine which in its original phrasing has become incomprehensible even for students of theology." Tillich is confident that he has the true meaning of the phrase "justification by faith" when he speaks of "accept your acceptance."

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., I, 285.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Tillich, The Courage to Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 164.

In the last year of his life Tillich stated that he seldom used the word 'forgiveness' anymore. It is a word that

often produces a bad superiority in him who forgives and the humiliation of him who is forgiven. Therefore, I prefer the concept of acceptance . . . This is really the center of which we call the "good news" in the Christian message.<sup>7</sup>

Tillich's theology of grace is inseparable from his understanding of sin. As he writes, "Sin is estrangement, grace is reconciliation."<sup>8</sup> Or, as he adds succinctly, grace "reunites the estranged."<sup>9</sup> Tillich accepts Luther's phrase, "bondage of the will," as an apt description of man's inability to act in such a way to "overcome existential estrangement." "Destiny keeps freedom in bondage without eliminating it."<sup>10</sup>

One of the important points that Tillich makes when stating that the grace of God overcomes man's estrangement is that man remains a sinner.

Grace does not create a being who is unconnected with the one who receives grace. Grace does not destroy essential freedom; but it does what freedom under the conditions of existence cannot do, namely, it reunites the estranged.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>"Paul Tillich and Carl Rogers: a dialogue," Pastoral Psychology, XIX:181 (February 1968), 59.

<sup>8</sup>Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 57.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., II, 79.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., II, 78.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., II, 79.

Tillich comments in a section on the "reality of grace"<sup>12</sup> that the most profound difference between the Protestant and Roman Catholic view of grace is in the interpretation of grace as an "objective" reality. Tillich perceives the Catholic view as one in which "the finite form is transmuted into a divine form." As an example of this,

The material of the sacrament is a such filled with grace (the dogma of transubstantiation). In all this, grace is interpreted as a tangible, special reality--an object like other natural or historical objects--and this in spite of its transcendent, and therefore unconditional meaning.

In contrast to this, "Protestantism asserts that grace appears through a living Gestalt which remains in itself what it is." Tillich uses the German word Gestalt to refer to the total structure of a living reality, such as a social group, an individual person, or a biological body. The term means a "sacred structure of reality." "The Church in its spiritual quality, as an object of faith, is a 'Gestalt of grace.'" Grace is embodied in the structure. Grace is real, but neither object nor tangible.

The divine appears through the humanity of Christ, through the historical weakness of the church, through the finite material of the sacrament . . . forms of grace are finite forms, pointing beyond themselves.

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<sup>12</sup>Paul Tillich, The Protestant Era (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 211f.

They are forms that are, so to speak, selected by grace, that it may appear through them; but they are not forms that are transmuted by grace so that they may become identical with it.

To identify grace with finite forms is demonic.

Tillich's thoughts on the relationship between faith and grace are appropriate at this point. We have just stated that grace is not something tangible. Nor can it be dispensed by some human authority. Grace is perceived and received by faith alone. "Faith means being grasped and being transformed by grace."<sup>13</sup> Or as Tillich writes in his book, The Dynamics of Faith, "Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned." It is participation in the subject of one's ultimate concern with one's whole being.<sup>14</sup> We experience faith because we have been "grasped by God in and through the Christ."<sup>15</sup> But there is another aspect to faith. Along with the Divine grasping man is possessed of a God-hunger. "Man is driven toward faith by his awareness of the infinite to which he belongs, but which he does not own like a possession."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Tillich, The Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 30, see also pp. 4, 105.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 9, see also p. 13.



Tillich is adamant that the phrase, 'justification by grace through faith,' is always to be used together. If the phrase, 'by grace,' is dropped, as it usually is, the impression is given that "faith is an act of man by which he merits justification." Tillich's position is, in summary: "The cause is God alone (by grace) but the faith that one is accepted is the channel through which grace is mediated to man (through faith)."<sup>17</sup>

When Tillich considers the eternal dimension of grace he selects the word "essentialization" to describe his theory. He raises the issue because not every one accepts saving grace. We must choose between double predestination and essentialization to solve the dilemma. Tillich rejects double predestination since this would introduce a split into God Himself. Tillich rejects this as demonic.<sup>18</sup> Tillich defends the abstract concept "essentialization," for it "emphasizes the despair of having wasted one's potentialities yet also assures the elevation of the positive within existence (even in the most unfilled life) into eternity."<sup>19</sup> God made the finite "very good."

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<sup>17</sup>Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 179.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., I, 285.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., III, 407.

If something is, if it has being, it is included in the creative divine love . . . The doctrine of the ambiguity of all human goodness and of the dependence of salvation on the divine grace alone either leads us back to the doctrine of double predestination or leads us forward to the doctrine of universal essentialization.<sup>20</sup>

## B. GRACE AND PERSONALITY

"The courage to be oneself" is the theme of Tillich's book, The Courage To Be. In the midst of the anxiety of death and fate, the anxiety of guilt and condemnation, and the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness, Tillich challenges his readers to receive the courage to be as oneself. Tillich writes that Luther's courage of confidence as a person was derived from a person-to-person encounter with God.<sup>21</sup> Tillich then relates his well-known words about acceptance to the courage to be oneself.

One could say that the courage to be is the courage to accept oneself as accepted in spite of being unacceptable . . . this is the genuine meaning of the Pauline-Lutheran doctrine of "justification by faith."<sup>22</sup>

The acceptance by God, his forgiving or justifying act, is the only and ultimate source of a courage to be which is able to take the anxiety of guilt and condemnation into itself.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., III, 408.

<sup>21</sup> Tillich, The Courage To Be, pp. 161f.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

In his book, The Protestant Era, Tillich discussed the relationship between grace and personality in a section entitled, "Personality and Soul." Tillich defined the soul as "the vital and emotional ground from which the self-conscious centre of personality arises."<sup>24</sup> Tillich observed that there was a disintegration on a terrifying scale of this vital part of man's being. He cited the increase in mental diseases, especially in Protestant countries, as an expression of such a disintegrating process. As the disintegration continued, Tillich hoped that a new form of personal life would emerge. The new form would come into being through the process of "growth." Grace is the power of spiritual growth. Tillich was using grace in a larger meaning than the "forgiveness of sins." Grace would encompass all sides of the personal life.<sup>25</sup>

Tillich further illuminated the relationship between grace and personality when he wrote that grace was the "possession from above," overcoming the "possession from below."<sup>26</sup> The personality of man is continuously being assaulted by dark unconscious forces. One example of this is called "possession." In cases of "possession"

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<sup>24</sup>Tillich, The Protestant Era, p. 131, see also p. 120.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 133ff.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

the personal centre is "split." Destructive forces from the "dark ground" of the personality conquer and possess man's consciousness. Such possessed persons were called "demonic" in the New Testament. Tillich stresses that Jesus did not proclaim the "ideal of personality," as a means of dealing with possessed persons. By that he means Jesus did not advocate a stereotyped view of man. Jesus did not teach self-control and discipline at the expense of vitality and abundance of life.<sup>27</sup> Jesus and his disciples overcame the possession from below by grace, the possession from above.

Possession from below "destroys the personal centre through the invasion of 'darkness.'" Grace

re-establishes it by elevating the creative power of the ground into the unity of a personal life. Every personality stands between possession and grace, susceptible to both. Personality is the open arena of the struggle between them.<sup>28</sup>

It is important to understand Tillich's concept of the demonic, which has been introduced in the preceding section. It relates specifically to the relationship between grace and personality. Tillich defines the demonic by referring back to the significance of demons. Demons did not deny the existence of God or gods. They "distorted" the divine by claiming the holy as their possession. The demonic therefore distorts the divine

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

by "identifying a particular bearer of holiness with the holy itself."<sup>29</sup> This happens to individuals and to social groups. Whenever the finite claims divinity, it becomes demonic. "The demonic is the elevation of something conditional to the unconditional significance."<sup>30</sup>

When the demonic becomes a reality, a "state of being split" occurs. For example, when an individual elevates one value within his centered personality and this becomes the criterion of all the others, he has created a split consciousness. This split in the personality is carried into all man's social groupings.

A nation that elevates itself over against all the others in the name of her God or system of values produces the reaction from other nations in the name of their God.<sup>31</sup>

In the realm of polytheism the demonic element is rooted in the "claim of each of the divine powers to be ultimate, although none of them possesses the universal basis for making such a claim. An absolute polytheism is impossible."<sup>32</sup>

If the church elevates itself, claiming for itself what can be rightly said only about the Cross of Christ, it becomes demonic. When the church forces its members

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<sup>29</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 102.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., I, 140.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., III, 103.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., I, 222.

to assent to historical creedal statements, when the church does not adapt the truth of its message to the "categories of understanding" of those to whom it ministers, it is demonic and "throws the truth like stones at the heads of people."<sup>33</sup>

"Holy objects" become demonic when they are regarded holy in and of themselves. They are holy only by negating themselves in pointing to the divine of which they are the mediums.<sup>34</sup> Tillich ties in the demonic with sin when he writes:

Sin is a state of things in which the holy and the secular are separated, struggling with each other and trying to conquer each other. It is the state in which God is not "all in all" . . . .<sup>35</sup>

In a conversation with Carl Rogers, Tillich gave a further definition to the word demonic. It

means a force, under a force, which is stronger than the individual good will . . . I mean it as structures which are ambiguous, both to a certain extent creative, but ultimately destructive . . . I had to find a term which covers the trans-personal power which takes hold of men and of society.

Attempts to overcome the conflict produced by the demonic usually have the effect of intensifying the struggle.

This is the influence of the demonic as Tillich sees it.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., III, 174, see also p. 186.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., I, 58.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., I, 218.

<sup>36</sup> "Paul Tillich and Carl Rogers: a dialogue," p. 58.

Man is so "possessed" by the powers from below, that he cannot extricate himself "by acts of freedom and good will." The demonic structures "are strengthened by such acts--except when the changing power is a divine structure, that is, a structure of grace."<sup>37</sup>

Since the church is a community of persons who are justified by grace through faith, it will be dealt with under the present heading, grace and personality.

Tillich knew the church had not always remembered the relationship between grace and personality. In Tillich's book, Theology and Culture, he writes in one section about the contribution that depth psychology has made to theology.

Theology had to learn from the psychoanalytic method, the meaning of grace, the meaning of forgiveness as acceptance of those who are unacceptable and not of those who are the good people. On the contrary, the non-good people are those who are accepted, or in religious language, forgiven, justified, whatever you wish to call it. The word grace, which, had lost any meaning, has gained a new meaning by the way in which the analyst deals with his patient. He accepts him. He does not say, "You are acceptable," but he accepts him. And that is the way in which, according to religious symbolism, God deals with us; and it is the way every minister and every Christian should deal with the other person.

The counselor "can be a medium of grace for him who comes to him."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 103.

<sup>38</sup>Paul Tillich, Theology of Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 124f.

Just as you cannot touch grace in the personal life, so you cannot see it in the life of a community.

He writes that a

Gestalt of grace is a possible object of "imaginative intuition" . . . A Gestalt of grace is a "transparent" Gestalt. Something shines through it which is more than it is. The church is church because it is transparent as a Gestalt of grace. The saint is saint, not because he is "good," but because he is transparent for something that is more than he himself is.

Only faith can perceive the grace in a Gestalt of grace.<sup>39</sup>

### C. GRACE AND OBEDIENCE

Tillich set the task of relating grace to obedience when he wrote in the introduction of his book Morality and Beyond: "Can we point to something that transcends both graceless moralism and normless relativism in ethical theory and moral action?"<sup>40</sup>

In answering this question, it is necessary to mention at the beginning Tillich's striking phrase, "New Being precedes new acting."<sup>41</sup> Man cannot achieve reunion with God by his own actions. Man's attempts to overcome his estrangement lead to joyless toil and failure. Man's

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<sup>39</sup>Tillich, The Protestant Era, p. 212.

<sup>40</sup>Paul Tillich, Morality and Beyond (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1963), p. 14.

<sup>41</sup>Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 79.



work and the moral law are necessary. But they lack the power to reunite men to God.

Grace alone can reunite man with God and man with man, and man with himself. Grace has appeared in the Christ, the New Being, in whose life we can participate, and out of which true thought and right action can follow, however fragmentarily.

Wherever reunion occurs, wherever there is acceptance and forgiveness, grace is active. Grace is not produced by one's will or endeavour. "One simply receives it." "Elements of grace permeate everyone's life."<sup>42</sup>

Equally important in understanding Tillich's concept of obedience is his often repeated statement that love is the norm for ethical action. Tillich finds the meaning of ethics here: "the expression of the ways in which love embodies itself, and life is maintained and saved."<sup>43</sup>

In recognizing love as the source of moral norms, Tillich goes beyond the absolute versus relative controversy. "An unchanging principle, it nevertheless always changes in its concrete application. It 'listens' to the particular situation."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Tillich, Morality and Beyond, p. 62.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

On the one hand, ethical action is ultimately serious because it expresses the "Will of God." The "Will of God" for Tillich is not some external will imposed upon man. It is "our essential being with all its potentialities."<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, ethical action, rooted in love, is capable of appropriate action in every individual and social situation, without losing its entity. "Love alone can adapt itself to every phase of a changing world."<sup>46</sup>

In his last book he said:

Let us suppose that a student comes to me faced with a difficult moral situation. In counselling him I don't quote the Ten Commandments, or the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, or any other law, not even a law of general humanistic ethics. Instead, I tell him to find out what the commandment of agape in his situation is, and then decide for it even if traditions and conventions stand against his decision.<sup>47</sup>

Essential to Tillich's ethics is his emphasis on the supreme value of the person. The moral act for Tillich is not obedience to some external law whether human or divine. "The moral act establishes man as a person, and as a bearer of the spirit."<sup>48</sup> The primary emphasis in Tillich's understanding of the moral act "is

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 23f.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>47</sup>Paul Tillich, My Search for Absolutes (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 109.

<sup>48</sup>Tillich, Morality and Beyond, p. 18.

the command to become what one potentially is, a person within a community of persons."<sup>49</sup> There comes a time and place when the person must demand: "acknowledge me as a person. You cannot use me as a means."<sup>50</sup>

It is because love is the meaning of ethics that it may criticize all the ethical content of both the Old and New Testaments. Love decides, at the right time, the kairos, what is the validity and application of Biblical ethics.<sup>51</sup>

In clarifying the relationship between love and justice, Tillich wrote: "Love shows what is just in the concrete situation."<sup>52</sup> He clarifies his meaning of the relationship between love and justice when he writes: "Love reunites; justice preserves what is to be united. It is the form in which and through which love performs its work."<sup>53</sup>

But there is a right time for action, "kairos." In history the great changes have occurred at strategic moments. The kairos for an action or idea had arrived.

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>50</sup>Tillich, My Search for Absolutes, p. 94.

<sup>51</sup>Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 160, see also p. 268.

<sup>52</sup>Paul Tillich, Love, Power and Justice (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 82.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

Its fulfillment was assured. The question is, when is the right time for any given act? Tillich answers: "Only love is able to appear in every kairos."<sup>54</sup> Such a conception of love realizing itself from kairos to kairos bypasses the debate over absolute versus relative ethics.

But lest we come to the conclusion that Tillich is merely a contextualist or a situationist, hear his answer to the question as to whether laws and institutions are really necessary in the ethical process.

Indeed, law and institutions are required. They are required by love itself . . . Love demands laws and institutions, but love is always able to break through them in a new kairos, and to create new laws and new systems of ethics.<sup>55</sup>

Often grace has been a cover for all kinds of lawlessness. This simply shows the person has not been grasped by grace. "Only if the acceptance of the unacceptable is misunderstood as a merely intellectual act does it remain without moral motivating power."<sup>56</sup>

There is still an element of risk involved even when love is acknowledged as the norm for moral action. Given the "right time" for action, making an ethical decision is not without the possibility of being wrong. "The courage to be oneself" is in large part what Tillich

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<sup>54</sup>Tillich, Morality and Beyond, pp. 90ff.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 63f.

means by risk. "Courage implies risk, and man must take the risk of misconceiving the situation and of acting ambiguously and against love--perhaps because he acts against a traditional ethical norm or perhaps because he subjects himself to a traditional ethical norm."<sup>57</sup> This is the risk one must take in applying "the courage of love to the unique situation."

When Tillich applies his view of grace as the motivating power of ethics to the church, he writes: "Morality in the Spiritual Community is determined by grace."<sup>58</sup> It is our participation in Christ as the New Being that makes the moral act possible within the church. It is grace that saves us from the ambiguities of the law.

An eloquent presentation of the meaning of obedience in a time of the silence of God is to be found in a chapter Tillich has in his book the Theology of Culture.<sup>59</sup> Tillich is answering an address Einstein had delivered on "Science and Religion." Einstein had attacked the idea of a Personal God. One of the arguments dealt with the age old problem of the existence of evil in the presence of a good God. Tillich argues that the symbol of omnipotence

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<sup>57</sup>Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 274.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., III, 159.

<sup>59</sup>Tillich, Theology of Culture, pp. 127f.

means that "no structure of reality and no event in nature and history has the power of removing us from" God. Tillich illustrates what he means from the Isaiah 40 imagery. Isaiah depicts the power of God when he describes the nothingness of the world empires in comparison with the divine power to fulfill its purpose through an infinitely small group of exiled people. The power of God is seen when Paul writes in Romans chapter 8 to a few Christians in the big city slums that nothing can separate them from the love of God.

Going beyond the influence of Christians Tillich says that secularism is a "concealed form of grace." This view of secularism indicates that grace is not bound up with explicit religion or with those forms that are expressly set up by the church to act as the means of grace.<sup>60</sup> This statement has important implications for our understanding of grace as it relates to obedience and will be dealt with in chapter five.

#### D. SUMMARY

Chapter one has been a consideration of Tillich's theological understanding of grace. In the relationship between grace and salvation Tillich stressed that grace

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<sup>60</sup>Tillich, The Protestant Era, p. 295.

was the action of God independent of man's actions. This is so important to Tillich that he calls it the Protestant Principle. Saving grace reunites the estranged. Grace is not an object but appears through a Gestalt of grace. Grace selects forms which remain forms, but point beyond themselves. Grace is received through faith, but grace is always the prius of faith.

In considering the relationship between grace and personality Tillich centers upon the courage to be oneself, because God has accepted us. The personality of man is a battlefield. Forces from below and from above struggle to possess him. The demonic is the force from below. It gives rise to a state of being split and is destructive of human personality. Grace is the love of God that reunites and overcomes the demonic. The church is one of the forms through which grace works. Though grace is not a visible entity in the church, it is transparent as a Gestalt of grace.

Grace when received by faith, leads to new action. The norm for all man's ethical action is love. Love alone is both universal and concrete. Love demands that the moral act always affirm the human personality. Justice becomes the form through which love does its work. Love

works through laws and institutions. God is present in the time of his silence. Grace is at work in the world of the secular. We now turn to how Tillich communicated these themes in his preaching.



## CHAPTER II

### TILLICH'S PREACHING OF GRACE

#### A. GRACE AND SALVATION

Tillich has published sixty one sermons in three volumes of sermons. It is from this selection that I have gathered the mainstream of his thoughts in which grace is related to salvation, personality and obedience. The first section of this chapter deals with the relationship between grace and salvation.

Tillich sounded the triumphant note of God's salvation in a prophetic sermon entitled: "The Shaking of the Foundations."<sup>1</sup> He described Isaiah's phrase, "Earth is split in pieces," as poetry. For modern man it is "a hard reality." Man has unlocked the forces of the ground and has subjected this energy to "his will." But man has willed destruction. In Isaiah (24:18-20) it is God who shakes the "foundations of the earth." But in our day it is as though God gave the power to shake the foundations of the earth into the hands of man. The question is: "How will man use it?"

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), pp. 1-11.

The scientists who participated in harnessing the power of the atom are anxious about their work. They feel responsible for what they have done. They even despise their work because they see how little chance there is to escape the destructive use of their discovery. They urge us to use this chance. But they waver between "little hope and much despair."

Man is still saying that he can use this power constructively. He is still planning, and acting in a state of estrangement from God. The result is widespread cynicism. In the last analysis there are only two alternatives that remain for man. It is a choice between

despair, which is the certainty of eternal destruction, or faith, which is the certainty of eternal salvation. "The world itself shall crumble, but . . . my salvation knows no end," says the Lord. This is the alternative for which the prophets stood.

The prophets of old spoke as they did, and overcame despair, because they saw "beyond the sphere of destruction, they saw the sphere of salvation; because in the doom of the temporal, they saw the manifestation of the Eternal." Tillich concluded with a note of hope that invited his hearers to "see, through the crumbling of a world, the rock of eternity and the salvation which has no end!"

In this sermon Tillich does not give a definition to the word salvation. He holds the word up as an alternative to despair. It was in a sermon entitled, simply,

"Salvation"<sup>2</sup> that Tillich gave content to the word salvation in his preaching.

In this sermon Tillich sought to communicate the original meaning of the word salvation so that his hearers would hear it in the depths of their being.

Tillich used as his text the petition in the Lord's prayer "save us from the evil one." (Matthew 6:13b) The two images he used to interpret the word were "saving" and "delivering." Jesus is the physician who brings healing to the sick. Jesus is also the one who delivers, liberates, and sets free what is in a state of bondage. The images are two ways of looking at salvation.

That from which we are saved is the

enslaving power which prevents us from fulfilling our human destiny; . . . the wall that separates us from the eternal life to which we belong; . . . the sickness of our being and that of our world caused by this separation. Salvation happens whenever the enslaving power is conquered, whenever the wall is broken through, whenever the sickness is healed.

All healing and liberating power comes from God. Those who are channels of this power are the liberators and healers.

In this sermon the place of Christ in salvation is that "in him we see the power which heals us by accepting us." Jesus is the one saviour that Christianity

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<sup>2</sup>Paul Tillich, The Eternal Now (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), pp. 112-21.

affirms had "saving grace without limits." But God is the saviour through him.

Each person is a healer, a saviour, possessed in some degree of "saving grace." For example, a physician becomes a saviour for someone when he functions, as every saviour does, as an instrument of God's healing power. Salvation is experienced in the context of life and history. It is limited if we do not trust the healer. It is limited if we are not open to liberation from evil.

In applying the implications of salvation to the healing of the nations, Tillich makes this lucid when he writes: "Nations are saved if there is a small minority, a group of people, who represent what the nation is called to be."

The same is true for mankind as a whole. "Its future will be dependent on a saving group." This involves each person. Salvation is from God but each one of us is called to be an instrument of God's saving grace in the totality of our lives.

In a sermon entitled: "To Whom Much is Forgiven"<sup>3</sup> Tillich relates salvation more directly to forgiveness. Tillich uses Luke 7:36-47 as the Scriptural base for this sermon. Simon judges and condemns the woman. He is,

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<sup>3</sup>Paul Tillich, The New Being (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), pp. 3-14.

therefore, unable to help her. Jesus declares that she is forgiven. He accepts her, which means she is able to accept herself. "Being forgiven and being able to accept oneself are one and the same thing."

Tillich exhorts the church to join with Jesus and not Simon in its encounter with those who are rightly judged unacceptable. That is, the church should demonstrate God's love which is rooted in the forgiveness that accepts the unacceptable.

Tillich's theory of the atonement is that "in him (Christ) we see the power which heals us by accepting us." Tillich becomes more explicit about the dynamics of salvation in his sermon on "He Who is the Christ."<sup>4</sup> In this sermon Tillich stated that

when the Divine is rejected, it takes the rejection upon itself. It accepts our crucifixion, our pushing away, the defence of ourselves against it. It accepts our refusal to accept, and thus conquers us. That is the centre of the mystery of the Christ.

In this same sermon Tillich is careful to preserve man's freedom. God does not impose his power upon us. He does not break our resistance by an irresistible divine display of wisdom and perfection. He could not win our hearts by blinding us with His glory.

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<sup>4</sup>Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations, pp. 141-148.

Rather, "God made Himself small for us in Christ. In so doing, He left us our freedom and our humanity. He showed us His Heart, so that our hearts could be won." The Crucified has revealed the Heart of God with such fullness that we may say of Jesus alone: "Thou art the Christ."

Tillich views salvation in relationship to nature as well as to man. In a sermon entitled: "Nature, Also, Mourns For a Lost Good"<sup>5</sup> Tillich makes this the theme of his sermon.

The glory of nature is in its reflection of the Divine Ground. The tragedy of nature is symbolized in "the melancholy of the leaves falling in autumn." There is a veil of sadness spread over all of nature. As the tragedy of nature is bound to the tragedy of man, so the salvation of nature is dependent on the salvation of man.

Tillich's reasoning is that man has destroyed the harmony by violating the divine law. There is enmity between man and nature, between nature and nature. Man's salvation is in Jesus because it was in his life that "the forces of separation and tragedy are overcome."

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 76-86.

Tillich uses the sacraments as a symbol that

nature participates in the process of salvation. Bread and wine, water and light, and all the great elements of nature become the bearers of spiritual meaning and saving power. Natural and spiritual powers are united-reunited-in the sacrament . . . It (sacrament) is the symbol of nature and spirit, united in salvation.

Tillich gives the element of personal decision an effective part in man's reception of the salvation that God offers. In a sermon "Doing the Truth"<sup>6</sup> he concludes with an evangelical fervour.

You cannot have opinion about the Christ after you have faced Him. You can only do the truth by following Him, or do the lie by denying Him . . . The decision for or against truth is the life-and-death decision, and this decision is identical with the decision in which Christ is accepted or rejected.

This is what Tillich means by "saving truth."

#### B. GRACE AND PERSONALITY

Tillich was a realist in his treatment of the human personality. The unmistakable impression his sermons suggest is that here is a man who has plumbed the depths of his own personality. In so doing, he has a profound understanding of the personality of all men.

In a sermon entitled, "The Depth of Existence," Tillich said: "The pain of looking into one's own depth is too intense for most people."<sup>7</sup> As a result we treat

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 114-17.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

ourselves like "hit-and-run drivers." We prefer to live on the surface because of the suffering involved in a serious attempt to discover ourselves in the depths of our being.

Basic to Tillich's understanding of the human personality is the hostility we carry against ourselves and against others. In the first point of his sermon, "The New Being," Tillich related the New Creation to reconciliation. He called on his hearers to "be reconciled to God." That meant, at the same time, to be reconciled to ourselves.

One speaks so often of pride and arrogance and self-certainty and complacency in people. But this is, in most cases, the superficial level of their being. Below this, in a deeper level, there is self-rejection, disgust, and even hatred of one's self. Be reconciled to God; that means at the same time, be reconciled to ourselves. But we are not; we try to appease ourselves. We try to make ourselves more acceptable to our own judgment and, when we fail, we grow more hostile toward ourselves.<sup>8</sup>

Tillich's perception of the human personality often surfaced in his sermons. He knew that the gospel could only be effective in its transforming work if it encountered the real substance of our personality. In his sermon, "Be Strong," Tillich stressed the need to be on guard for the double nature of our personality structure. He said:

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<sup>8</sup>Tillich, The New Being, p. 21.



There is a non-Christian in every Christian. There is a weak being in every strong one. There is cowardice in every courage, and unbelief in every faith, and hostility in every love.<sup>9</sup>

Into this understanding of the human personality Tillich preached that the first step in becoming a strong personality for many was to honestly confess where they now stood. Tillich addressed these people in a sermon entitled "Be Strong."

Accept that you are weak. Don't pretend that you are strong. And perhaps if you dare to be what you are, your weakness will become your strength. Accept that you are weak--that is what we should say to those who are weak. "Accept that you are a coward"--that is what we should say to those who are cowardly. "Accept that you are wavering in the faith"--that is what we should say to those who are not firm in it. And to those who don't love, we should say--"Accept that you are not able to love."<sup>10</sup>

In this sermon Tillich did not state in positive terms the way in which grace empowers us to accept our weakness. His answer is to be found in an address to the 1955 graduating class at Union Theological Seminary, New York, entitled: "Heal the Sick; Cast Out the Demons."<sup>11</sup> Tillich reminded them that their task was "to pronounce and to represent the healing . . . power . . . of the Christ." Men are enabled to accept their weakness when

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<sup>9</sup>Tillich, The Eternal Now, p. 149.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 147f.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-65.

they are confronted by the Christ and accept His acceptance of them. They had "learned the good news" that heals the sick.

You have learned that the name of the healing power is grace, be it the grace of nature on which every physician depends, as even ancient medicine knew, or the grace in history that sustains the life of mankind by traditions and heritage and common symbols, or the grace of revelation that conquers the power of the demons by the message of forgiveness and of a new reality.

But the sermon in which he dealt most fully with the relationship between grace and the human personality was entitled, "You Are Accepted."<sup>12</sup>

Although Tillich does not limit his sermon to the personal, the stress is primarily on "simply accept the fact that you are accepted!" It is for this reason I am selecting this sermon as an example of Tillich's preaching of grace as it relates to personality.

Although Tillich does not limit his sermon to the personal, the stress is primarily on "simply accept the fact that you are accepted!" It is for this reason I am selecting this sermon as an example of Tillich's preaching of grace as it relates to personality.

Tillich takes his text from Romans 5:20: "More-over the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

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<sup>12</sup>Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations, pp. 153-63.

Tillich recognizes there are no substitutes for words like "sin" and "grace." However, he uses the word "separation" as a useful clue in interpreting the meaning of the word "sin." Sin is separation. This state of separation is visible among individuals, within ourselves, and between all men and God. Therefore we must recognize that before sin is an act, it is a state.

Sin and grace are bound to each other. That is, sin is a reality to us only if we have already experienced grace. And the meaning of grace is grasped only as we have experienced the separation of life, which is sin.

Grace does not mean it is God's business to forgive. It is not some spiritual entity without practical significance. Nor is it a mere explanation of the benevolent side of life. Neither is it mere skill in good will toward others. Rather, "grace is the reunion of life with life, the reconciliation of the self with itself. Grace is the acceptance of that which is rejected."

Tillich asks us to honestly confess the split within ourselves, the inner conflict of hate and love. He asks us to acknowledge the sense of unrelatedness that constitutes our sense of separation from others. Going a step further, he suggests that we are thus estranged from others and within ourselves because we are estranged from God.

Tillich illustrates grace by referring to St. Paul's conversion. "The moment in which grace struck him," Paul experienced reunion and acceptance.

You cannot manipulate grace. You cannot coerce grace. You cannot receive grace when you have no sense of need.

Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness . . . when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life . . . when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual . . . when our disgust for our own being . . . our weakness . . . have become intolerable to us.

Then comes Tillich's thrilling affirmation of grace as accepting the unacceptable. Into this very human situation, it is as though a voice were saying:

You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you . . . Simply accept the fact that you are accepted! . . . In that moment grace conquers sin, and reconciliation bridges the gulf of estrangement.

Having experienced God's grace accepting us, we experience moments in which we accept ourselves. "If only more such moments were given to us!" stated Tillich in one of his self-revealing touches.

Grace as reunion gives to us the power to break through the walls that separate us from others. We can accept the other person, even if it be hostile and harmful to us, because, through grace, we know the other person belongs to God who has accepted us.

In his sermon on "The New Being"<sup>13</sup> Tillich clarifies his understanding of the relationship between grace and the Church.

. . . Here the reunion of man to man is pronounced and confessed and realized, even if in fragments and weaknesses and distortions. The Church is the place where the reunion of man with man is an actual event, though the Church of God is permanently betrayed by the Christian Churches.

### C. GRACE AND OBEDIENCE

Tillich dealt most fully with his understanding of obedience in a sermon entitled, "The Yoke of Religion."<sup>14</sup> He did not deal with obedience in direct reference to grace as a word. He relates our obedience to Jesus as the New Being. But the element of grace is dominant at the heart of his message, as is seen in the following quotation:

Forget all Christian doctrines; forget your own certainties and your own doubts, when you hear the call of Jesus. Forget all Christian morals, and your achievements and your failures, when you come to Him . . . But what is demanded is only your being open and willing to accept what is given to you, the New Being, the being of love and justice and truth, as it is manifest in Him Whose yoke is easy and Whose burden is light.

Tillich's scripture was the well-known pericope from Matthew 11:25-30. Tillich communicated the message

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<sup>13</sup>Tillich, The New Being, pp. 23f.

<sup>14</sup>Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations, pp. 93-103.

of these words, applicable to every human being and every human situation, under three questions.

The first question is, what is the labor and burden from which we can find rest through Christ? Tillich's exegesis rules out the easing of burdens and labors of daily life. He rejects the interpretation that means taking sin or guilt less seriously.

The burden Jesus wants to remove from us is the burden of religion, the yoke of the religious law. We make Jesus into the bringer of a new law if we make Christianity a religion which demands the acceptance of certain ideas, dogmas, doctrines and traditions, as the condition of salvation. This is a distortion of Christ. In fact, Christ frees us from this burdensome kind of religion.

The second question Tillich asks from the text is, What is the easy yoke Jesus will put upon us? If it is not a new law, or a new demand, or a new doctrine, or new morals, what is it? Tillich declares, it is a "new being." It is a "new reality." It is a "new power of transforming life."

Jesus says it is easy because it is not a matter of our acting and striving. It is given before anything we can do. We are grasped by this new being in the midst of our despair and fear and restlessness. Though we do

not become wiser and more understanding, more moral or more saintly, we know that "the good of life is in us, uniting us with the good of everything . . . ."

The third question Tillich asks from the pericope is, why is He and He alone able to give such rest to our souls? Tillich answers, that which is hidden most of the time from us, is the forming power of his life. Jesus is the new being.

Everyone can participate in this New Being, because it is universal and omnipresent. Nothing is demanded of you except your being open and willing to accept what is given to you, the New Being, the being of love and justice and truth, as it is manifested in Him . . . .

In the conclusion of this sermon Tillich makes a stirring appeal:

Do not ask in this moment what we shall do or how action shall follow from the New Being, from the rest in our souls. Do not ask; for you do not ask how the good fruits follow from the goodness of a tree. They follow; action follows being, and new action better action, stronger action, follows new being, better being, stronger being . . . . Our actions would be more creative, more conquering, conquering the tragedy of our time, if they grew out of a more profound level of our life.

In a sermon entitled "Doing the Truth"<sup>15</sup> Tillich saw truth centered in Christ. Nor can there be a cleavage between theory and practice when it comes to the truth. If one is grasped by the truth, it will be expressed in our day to day living. "In Christianity truth is found

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 114-17.

if it is done, and done if it is found . . . In Christianity truth is the new creation, realizing itself in history."

For Tillich, obedience without love was no obedience. The criterion for those who belong to Jesus is love as "triumphantly manifest in Christ the Crucified." If God truly abides in us, we abide in his love. After making this point in a sermon entitled: "The Power of Love,"<sup>16</sup> based on the words of I John 4:16; Tillich went on to tell the moving story of Elsa Brandstrom. She was a woman whose life was spent abiding in love. She devoted her life in loving service as a nurse in prison camps, in providing for the needs of orphaned children of prisoners of war, and helping war refugees. "The irresistible power of love was with her . . . She made God transparent . . . for God, was abiding in her and she in him."

Our obedience sometimes reveals a rare quality of love that Tillich called "Holy Waste."<sup>17</sup> In this sermon Tillich paid tribute to those who rendered obedience from the "abundance of the heart." He was comparing this to the "reasonable" and "calculated" service of much of our obedience. He referred to Jesus' life as one in which He

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<sup>16</sup>Tillich, The New Being, pp. 25-29.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-49.



wasted himself in order to become the Christ. He wondered if Protestantism had not "lost a great deal by losing the wasteful self-surrender of the saints and the mystics." He called on his listeners to possess "the abundance of heart to waste ourselves as our reasonable service!"

Obedience must look seriously at the meaning of justice. Tillich, in preaching on The Golden Rule, said:

Love makes justice just. Justice without love is always injustice because it does not do justice to the other one, nor to oneself, nor to the situation in which we meet. . . . [Love] does not add something to what justice does but it shows justice what do do.<sup>18</sup>

Truth was an integral part of obedience in Tillich's thinking. Tillich believed truth was reached "by doing it." Do the truth meant "participating in His being." The truth was therefore closely connected with love. Because God is love, the

truth united with love; and be certain that you are of the truth and that the truth has taken hold of you only when love has taken hold of you and has started to make you free from yourselves.<sup>19</sup>

Tillich believed that when we called God "Father," "obedience has ceased to be obedience and has become free inclination."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 32f.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>20</sup> Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations, p. 137.

Tillich often referred to our obedience as a "manifestation" of God or a "sign" pointing beyond itself to God. In a sermon entitled the "Spiritual Presence," Tillich enumerated some of the "manifestations" of the Spiritual Presence.

The Spirit can work in you, awakening the desire to strive towards the sublime against the profanity of the average day. The Spirit can give you the courage that says "yes" to life in spite of the destructiveness you have experienced around you and within you . . . The Spirit can make you love, with the divine love, someone you profoundly dislike or in whom you have no interest. The Spirit can conquer your sloth towards what you know is the aim of your life, and it can transform your moods of aggression and depression into stability and serenity . . . These are the works of the Spirit, signs of the Spiritual Presence with us and in us.<sup>21</sup>

In another sermon he said:

We, the ministers and teachers of Christianity, do not call you to Christianity but rather to the New Being to which Christianity should be a witness and nothing else, not confusing itself with that New Being.<sup>22</sup>

Truth was realized in history, but it was only actualized in part. In his sermon "Doing The Truth," Tillich said:

Truth is hidden and must be discovered. No one possesses it naturally. It dwells in the depth, beneath the surface . . . The depth is eternal . . . Truth is a stream of life, centered in Christ, actualized in everybody who is connected with Him.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Tillich, The Eternal Now, pp. 85f.

<sup>22</sup>Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations, p. 102.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

Christianity testifies to the truth as it realizes itself in the new creation in history. But the truth as apprehended by men is only a sign of the unknown depths of truth.

Tillich saw work as the action of man pointing beyond itself. In a sermon on "God's Pursuit of Man," Tillich spoke of work as one way man seeks to escape from God's presence. This motive robs work of its true meaning. Tillich said: "Work points beyond itself. And because it does so, it becomes blessed, and we become blessed through it."<sup>24</sup>

Tillich viewed prayer as pointing beyond itself to "the act of God who is working in us and raises our whole being to Himself."<sup>25</sup>

The Church and the Bible do "not point to themselves, but to the reality which breaks again and again through the established forms of their authority and through the hardened forms of our personal experience."<sup>26</sup>

The above references in the sermons of Tillich suggest the importance he gave to obedience as a "sign" pointing to God. He refers to Matthias Grunewald's

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<sup>24</sup>Tillich, The Eternal Now, p. 109.

<sup>25</sup>Tillich, The New Being, p. 138.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

picture of John the Baptist. John's finger, pointed towards the Cross, is the greatest symbol for the true authority of Christianity.

Tillich gave serious consideration to the silence of God under a phrase the "absent God." In a sermon delivered in the Chapel at Union Theological Seminary, New York, he preached on the theme, "Spiritual Presence."<sup>27</sup> Mention has already been made of some of the specific manifestations of the Spiritual Presence in the lives of people. At one point he dealt with the problem of the "absent God," in relationship to his theme. He asked the cause of God's absence. He replied with man's "resistance, our lack of seriousness, our honest or dishonest questioning, our genuine or cynical doubt!" Normally these would be the main content of a sermon on this topic. But Tillich claimed "the final answer to the question as to who makes God absent is God himself!"

We live in an era in which the God we know is the absent God. But in knowing God as the absent God, we know of him; we feel his absence as the empty space which is left by something or someone which belonged to us and has vanished from our view. It is not that the Spirit has ceased to be present. The empty space is God's space. But whether we experience God as present or absent, it is the work of the Spirit.

Tillich often felt the limitations of words to describe the life of the Spirit. He felt this

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<sup>27</sup> Tillich, The Eternal Now, pp. 81-91.

particularly in presenting this theme. In concluding his sermon he said: "And if the words are failing us in the absence of God, we may look without words at the image of him in whom the Spirit and the Life were manifest without limits."

Our obedience has often to be effected in the context of the tragic and the meaningless. Tillich faced this squarely in a sermon entitled, "The Riddle of Inequality." He cites certain situations where the question "why?" may be written large. What is the answer?

It is the greatness . . . of the Christian message that God, as manifest in the Christ on the Cross, totally participates in the dying of a child, in the condemnation of the criminal, in the disintegration of a mind, in starvation and famine, and even in the human rejection of Himself. There is no human condition into which the divine presence does not penetrate. This is what the Cross, the most extreme of all human conditions, tells us. The riddle of inequality . . . is eternally solved through the divine participation in the life of all of us and every being. The certainty of divine participation gives us the courage to endure the riddle of inequality, although our finite minds cannot solve it.<sup>28</sup>

Obedience involves risk. At the conclusion of a sermon in which Tillich uncovered the conformist tendencies of man, he challenged his audience to accept the risk involved in obedience.

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

He who risks and fails can be forgiven. He who never risks and never fails is a failure in his whole being. . . . Therefore, dare to be not conformed to this eon, but transform it courageously first in yourselves, then in your world in the spirit and the power of love.

#### D. SUMMARY

In this chapter we have observed that Tillich says modern man has a choice between two alternatives--despair or salvation. Jesus is the one saviour who possessed saving grace without limits. Whoever heals and liberates is also a saviour. Being forgiven is the same thing as being able to accept oneself. If Tillich has a theory of the atonement, it is in Christ's acceptance of the human rejection of himself. Even nature is affected by man's estrangement from God. The decision for or against Christ determines a man's salvation.

Tillich's approach to the human personality is in depth. He sees man's great problem in his inability to accept himself. Reconciliation to God means reconciliation to ourselves. Only as the grace of God encounters the real personality can the healing power of his grace become effective. Tillich's great watchword is: "Accept the fact that you are accepted." Grace is reunion of the estranged, realized in the Church.

Obedience for the Christian is not to a new law, but in participation in the New Being. New action follows

New Being. So Tillich can say that truth is found if it is done and done if it is found. The love of Christ is the criterion for the Christian's obedience. Justice becomes the form created by love. An important part of Tillich's thinking is that obedience is a sign pointing beyond itself to the One whom we are obedient. Even in times when men refer to the "absent God," Tillich's stance is one of faith in his presence.

It is the Cross that gives man the courage to face the enigmas of life. Men need courage to risk acting obediently. Having considered Tillich's preaching of grace in this chapter, and his theology of grace in chapter one, we now turn to the Biblical teaching on grace.

## CHAPTER III

### GRACE IN THE BIBLE

This chapter will be normative for the understanding of grace in this dissertation. A brief overview of grace in Biblical literature will provide the background for a more intensive study of Paul's understanding of grace. Recognizing that there are several passages that could be studied for Paul's view of grace, particularly his letter to the Galatians, I have selected Romans 5 and 6. One of the reasons for this selection is based on the fact that Tillich used this section on grace, entitled, "You are Accepted"<sup>1</sup> (Romans 5:20). Also this section of Romans is an expansion of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith stated briefly by Paul in Galatians 2:16-21. What Paul said in stark, short statements in Galatians, he amplifies and illustrates in detail in Romans chapters 5 and 6.

The common use of the word grace in the Greek language described persons who possessed charm, beauty, attractiveness. It was a short step to the word grace being extended to cover the ideas and actions contained in kindness, goodwill, favour and gratitude. A king, under

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), pp. 153-63.



no obligation to give favours, could act out of a spirit of goodwill for his subjects. Thus men sought for the "good favour" of kings and of the gods.

The word grace in the Bible is used almost exclusively of God and Christ. It can be used to describe human relationships as in classical Greek, but this is a secondary use of grace in the Bible.

#### A. GRACE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

There is no one word for grace in the Old Testament as there is in the New Testament. But the substance of God's grace is expressed in the most tender terms. God's unmerited love is set forth in intensely personal terms. The greatest example in Old Testament thought on the grace of God is his choice of Israel as his servant people. The unconditional love of God for Israel is brought out with particular clarity in Deuteronomy 7:6-8.

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers . . . .<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>See also Deuteronomy 9:4f, 10:15, 14:2, 23:5, Isaiah 43:10, etc.

As Norman Snaith has written: "The one thing of which all the Old Testament writers are certain is that God's love for Israel was not because of anything that Israel had or was."<sup>3</sup>

God's grace was signified in the covenant he made with Israel, his chosen people. God's loyalty to the covenant was a sign of his grace. God keeps "the oath which he swore to your fathers." God is "the faithful God who keeps covenant" with Israel (Deuteronomy 7:9). Professor T. F. Torrance says the covenant was "the sacramental pledge of God's unaccountable love."<sup>4</sup> The covenant was a sign of God's loving kindness. And even though Israel proves faithless and breaks the covenant, God will not give them up. This aspect of God's love is the heart of Hosea's message. Hosea chapter 11 throbs with the depth of God's grace.

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; . . . Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love . . . My people are bent on turning away from me; so they are appointed to the yoke, and none shall remove it. How can I give you up. O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! . . . My heart recoils within me, my

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<sup>3</sup>Norman H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1944), p. 135.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas F. Torrance, The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1948), p. 15.

compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger . . . for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy.<sup>5</sup>

The Psalmist puts it in one sentence: "But thou, O Lord, art a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Psalm 86: 15).

The loving-kindness of God carries with it the idea of God's unmerited favour, but it is also closely connected to the righteousness of God. The element of righteousness is integral to God's loving-kindness. As God comes to men out of loving-kindness, men are related to him in a response that involves righteousness. When men respond in lives that are righteous, it is a sign that they have made a true response to God's loving-kindness. The centrality of the law flows from this relationship between righteousness and loving-kindness. The law becomes "the connecting link between grace and righteousness."<sup>6</sup> Salvation in the Old Testament regards righteousness and love as a unity. God's love is a righteous love.

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<sup>5</sup>Peter Fransen, Divine Grace and Man (New York: Desclee, 1962), see pp. 43ff for a modern parable that lights up this theme using Ezekiel 16:1ff as the Scriptural basis.

<sup>6</sup>Torrance, op. cit., p. 18.

It is God's love that enables a sinner to stand before him.

#### B. GRACE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament some of the current meanings of grace are present, but grace takes on a specifically Christian content under the impact of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Grace is used in preference to the Old Testament word mercy. The New Testament does not emphasize man finding grace and favour before God. There is no suggestion of caprice on God's part, or merit on man's side. In the New Testament grace is "the divine love in redemptive action. Grace is in fact identical with Jesus Christ in person and word and deed."<sup>7</sup>

The Gospels do not give any definitive statement on grace. Grace is used only in Luke 2:40, and the prologue to John's Gospel, 1:14, 16, 17. It is not important that the word grace is not used in its distinctive New Testament sense because it is in Jesus Christ that we encounter the one who was "full of grace and truth" in his own person. Jesus freely chose his disciples. They did not make him their leader. His friendship with the "publicans and sinners," his healing of the mentally ill and physically handicapped, were all actions of his grace.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

The grace of God was a key part of his teaching. In the parables of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20: 1-16), and the Forgiving Father (Luke 15:1ff), grace is the underlying theme.

Torrance writes that the Gospels give us two main ideas related to grace.<sup>8</sup> In the accounts of Jesus' gracious actions, the emphasis is on his initiative and the initiative of God. The parable of the labourers in the vineyard is particularly appropriate for this observation. The second main element of grace is its relationship to Jesus Christ. When the early Church summarized his life, it said he was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). This identification of the grace of God with the words and actions of Jesus became normative for the New Testament understanding of grace. But it was not until Paul's theological reflections on the meaning of Christ's life and death and resurrection that we have the articulation of grace in its unique Christian sense. It is in Paul that grace becomes the dominant theme.<sup>9</sup>

Paul would undoubtedly be familiar with the common Greek usage of grace, and the Old Testament conception

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 23ff.

<sup>9</sup>James Moffatt, Grace in the New Testament (New York: Long and Smith, 1932), p. xv. See also p. 399.

of grace. However, Paul "never cites any Old Testament text for grace . . . He finds grace written for him in Jesus Christ alone, as though the Lord were God's living letter of grace to the world."<sup>10</sup> The grace of God is the saving deed God has accomplished for man through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Alan Richardson writes of grace in the New Testament that it "means primarily God's forgiving love towards man as sinful and gone astray."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 198f.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 282. See also Torrance, op. cit. He has an insightful word about the relationship between grace and Jesus Christ. He concludes that in the era of the Apostolic Fathers there emerged a corruption of grace. The meaning of grace was altered because they detached "the thought of grace from the person of Jesus Christ." (p. v) Grace became secondary to obedience. Precedence was given to "God's call to a new life in obedience to revealed truth." (p. 133). Torrance defines grace as "the primary and constitutive act in which out of free love God has intervened to set our life on a wholly new basis, but also means that through faith this may be actualized in flesh and blood because it has been actualized in Jesus Christ, who by the Cross and the Resurrection becomes our salvation, our righteousness, and our wisdom." (p. 33).

## C. GRACE IN ROMANS CHAPTERS 5 AND 6

In the next section we will take an overview of Paul's letter to the Romans and then focus on his teaching concerning grace in chapters 5 and 6. Moffatt sums up Paul's communication of the Gospel by saying: "All is of grace, and grace is for all."<sup>12</sup>

The purpose of this letter to the Romans was probably Paul's way of introducing himself to this church he did not found and over which he had no apostolic or pastoral oversight. The church in Rome did not know him personally, but they had undoubtedly heard of his reputation. Some information would be good, some would be strongly critical of Paul, and much would be controversial. He wrote to these Christians in Rome because he wanted them to see him as he was and not as his opponents had represented him to be. He reflects carefully upon the meaning of the gospel as he has experienced it. It is in this letter that we have the grandest exposition of Paul's view of the Christian faith. Barrett states it this way: "Paul's letter, then, represents . . . (the) exposition of 'his' Gospel to the Gentile churches which had come

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<sup>12</sup>Moffatt, op. cit., p. 131.

into existence independently of his efforts."<sup>13</sup> Bultmann writes that Paul wrote the letter to the Romans "to legitimate himself as a genuine apostle."<sup>14</sup>

There is also the very real possibility that Paul wrote the Letter to introduce himself to these Christians in Rome in such detail because he wants their support in his intended Spanish mission. He plans to visit them personally on the way to Spain. He would welcome any support they will offer to him. He takes great pains to clarify his faith in this letter. It will serve as a worthy letter of introduction preparing the way for his visit to them in person. Although we cannot know for sure what the reason was for the letter, the reason has to be weighty to account for such a lengthy and deliberate and thoughtful letter.

Romans chapters 5 and 6 provides the basis for an understanding of Paul's conception of grace. As we have noted, the grace of God is specifically and primarily related to God's saving action in Jesus Christ (5:15). Grace is an event initiated by God. The word grace has an active quality in its meaning. It is a word that is

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<sup>13</sup>C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, 7.



dynamic and alive. It is so because it is an event, originating in the love of God. As Bultmann writes: "The deed of divine grace consists in the fact God gave Christ up to die on the cross."<sup>15</sup>

This deed of God in Christ is an "eschatological deed." This means that grace "is a single deed which takes effect for everyone who recognizes it as such and acknowledges it (in faith)."<sup>16</sup> This one event gives us some indication of the greatness of the love of God that gave birth to such an event. It is an eschatological event with "cosmic" consequences. That is, the death and resurrection of Christ are "not incidents that took place once upon a time in the past. By them the old aeon along with its powers has been basically stripped of power."<sup>17</sup> We must be careful to hold together the event and its eschatological and cosmic dimensions. To ignore one side, or to overstress one part, would be to distort the whole.

Paul has very carefully detailed the helplessness of man in his sin. He has given an apt description of the universality of man's guilt before God (1:18-3:30). Into this human dilemma, void of any human solution, God graciously comes and acts in Jesus Christ. This gracious act

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., I, 292.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., I, 289.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., I, 299.

was never more perfectly stated than in Romans chapter 5:6,8. "While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly . . . God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." This is grace as God's saving event in the death of Christ.

In this gracious deed God "rightwises" the guilty, a term Bultmann's translator uses as a true English counterpart of the adjective "righteous" and the noun "righteousness."<sup>18</sup> Bultmann considers the word justification is the only other alternative to righteousness but feels this word and its cognates just and justify have too many misleading associations.

To be justified is not to be weakened to mean that God "treats us as though" we were righteous. Barrett writes:

It is far better, and more in harmony with Paul's teaching as a whole, to suppose that 'to justify' . . . does mean 'to make righteous,' but at the same time to recognize that 'righteous' does not mean 'virtuous,' but 'right,' 'clear,' 'acquitted' in God's court. Justification then means . . . an act of forgiveness on God's part.<sup>19</sup>

Knox accepts the meaning of "make" righteous in the sense of "appoint" or "constitute" (5:18). He offers

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., I, 289. See also footnote on p. 253.

<sup>19</sup>Barrett, op. cit., pp. 75f.

the following as a more accurate translation of 5:18: "As by one man's disobedience many were constituted sinners so by one man's obedience many will be constituted righteous."<sup>20</sup> If sin is not taken seriously, grace as a saving event is rendered unnecessary and will be omitted as a vital force in religion.

Grace is the free gift of God's gracious action in Jesus Christ. It is implied in Paul's doctrine of grace, but stated explicitly in 3:24 and 5:15ff. When writing in 3:24, Paul states that our justification by God's grace is "a gift." Both Moffatt and Goodspeed translate the Greek word *δωρεὰν* "for nothing," but in the high sense of the use of that phrase. We do not deserve God's grace. It is not of our doing. We must open our lives and receive God's grace, just as we have to open our hands to receive a gift from another.

In Romans 5:12-21, Paul proceeds to show the superiority of the deed of grace over sin. He has written of the power of sin in the life of all men (1:18-3:20). "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23).

In 5:12-14, Paul uses the Hebrew idea of solidarity to make his point that sin has affected the entire

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<sup>20</sup> John Knox, "The Epistle to the Romans: Exegesis," Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon: Cokesbury Press, 1954), IX, 376.

human race, beginning with the first man, Adam. Man in the old age of Adam, man outside Christ, is held fast under the reign of sin, with its ultimate consequence of death (5:12). Paul is saying that sin never was and is not at any time a private matter. Sin has interpersonal and social dimensions because of the interrelatedness of mankind.

In 5:15ff, Paul continues to apply the Hebrew idea of solidarity to Christ. However, he upsets the straightforward analogy between Adam and Christ by stating the superiority of grace through God's act in Christ (5:15). Grace leads to eternal life (5:21). As Barrett states: "Christ is the progenitor of a race."<sup>21</sup>

Paul becomes poetic when he exalts the reign of grace over the dominion of sin. Paul writes of "the excess of grace" and "the abundance of grace." The reign of grace has "much more" effect than the reign of death. In his victorious summary of the superiority of grace over sin, Paul writes: "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (5:20f). As Barrett comments,

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<sup>21</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 114.

"grace overbalances sin."<sup>22</sup> And again, "Paul stresses the surplus of grace in Christ over sin in Adam."<sup>23</sup>

Included in these verses influenced by the idea of man's solidarity is the universal dimension of God's gracious act in Christ. Moffatt's phrase captures the universal scope of grace in his phrase: "all is of grace and grace is for all." Moffatt states that the word "all" is used by Paul over seventy times in his letter to the Romans. Just as Adam's act of sin is the "instrumental cause of universal death," so the grace of God abounds for the many.

"All is of grace, and grace is for all," but not all are for grace. The grace of God must be acknowledged. God must be believed. God must be trusted. Man must participate in God's saving deed in Christ in order to stand in "grace" (5:2). Man is not justified by his works, but he is made right before God as he believes and trusts and commits himself to God's deed in Christ.

C. H. Dodd writes that the fundamental meaning of Paul's doctrine of faith is that "God is worthy of our trust. It remains for us to trust Him sufficiently to let Him act."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>24</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Meaning of Paul for Today (New York: Meridian, 1957), p. 108.

Paul has made it clear that to be made right before God by our efforts ends in failure. To be made right before God by the acceptance of God's own initiative in acquitting us, is to be in "a relationship which he makes possible, but which we could never establish by ourselves," writes John Knox. God creates what we could not--"a standing in which we can be treated as children of God."

Justification by works necessarily stresses outward patterns of behaviour. Justification by faith probes to the sources from which finally all conduct springs . . . Faith creates an attitude which cannot help expressing itself in a certain type of conduct, but the conduct is derivative and subsidiary.<sup>25</sup>

The preceding emphasis on faith leads us to Paul's teaching on the relationship between grace and obedience (6:1-23). Paul has given the preeminence to grace. Grace reigns to eternal life. He has made it clear that being precedes doing. He has stressed that what we are comes before what we do. Paul now sets before him the task of linking grace to our behaviour.

Paul would have agreed with Dietrich Bonhoeffer that grace unconnected to our daily life is "cheap grace." Grace without a sense of being "alive to God" day by day is "cheap grace." "Cheap grace" is simply talking about God, minus discipleship. "Cheap grace" is not the same as

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<sup>25</sup> Knox, op. cit., p. 376.

Paul's phrase "free grace." The grace of God was revealed in the costly deed of the death of Christ.

If our lives do not reflect being "alive to God"; if our ethical stance does not stem from being "united with him," then we are living the safety of "cheap grace" and not under the reign of free grace. Bonhoeffer puts it clearly: "Grace is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life."<sup>26</sup>

We live in a world where sin is still potent. Although sin is not lord in the life of the believer, it is still a force to be reckoned with both within us and outside us. One of the subtle perversions of the life of the believer is the tendency to underestimate the power of sin. Being in a state of grace there is the constant temptation to change "I am saved by God's grace" into "I am safe." Because this attitude is so insidious and destructive to the meaning of grace, Paul deals with it at great length in chapter 6.

Paul argues that sin and grace are incompatible. Just as death and life are opposites, just as light and darkness are extremes, so sin and grace cannot dwell together in a unity. One or the other must be lord

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<sup>26</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (London: SCM Press, 1951), p. 39.

(6:15-23). To be under the reign of grace is by its very nature to be "dead to sin" (6:2). Paul makes his point by referring to "baptism into Christ."

Some scholars contend that to Paul's converts baptism would be understood in the light of similar sacramental rites practised in the Greek mystery cults. The prevailing concept of all the mysteries was that spiritual effects were produced by the performance of physical acts. The dominant theme in such sacramental acts was the uniting of the worshipper with his dying and rising Saviour-God. C. H. Dodd writes: "In some cults such a union seems to have been regarded as a real dying and rising of the worshipper, in the sense that through the sacrament he acquired from the God an immortal essence."<sup>27</sup>

This is the way Paul's teaching on Baptism would be understood by many of his Gentile converts. Paul felt the force of this line of thinking. It was suggestive of the transformation Christ effected in those who responded to him in faith. Paul made the reference to baptism to illustrate the radical change that occurs in the life of the Christian. As Christ died to sin and now lives to God, so the believer, at baptism has died to sin so that he might walk in newness of life. That is, since Christ's

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<sup>27</sup> Dodd, op. cit., p. 118.



dying and rising were for our justification (4:25), the believer is to consider himself "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (6:11).

Barrett's reasoning states the case clearly.

It follows that a Christian (a) is dead as far as sin is concerned; (b) has been raised from the dead to new life; and (c) in this new life belongs to God. If this be true it is clear at once that any talk of continuing in sin (5:1) is a contradiction of Christian first principles.<sup>28</sup>

But baptism must be seen in its eschatological perspective. Baptism into Christ is a real dying and rising with Christ, but it is also a "sign" that Christians are members of the Age to Come. Paul believed that they were living in a world that was fast passing away. Christians were living "between the times." They were living in the last days of the history of man upon earth. Baptism, in its eschatological setting was a sign that the believer was participating in this in-between time, the time of the reign of grace.

This same eschatological backdrop gives meaning to the ethic of the Christian. Continuing the thought of union with Christ, introduced in the baptism reference, Paul says the obedience of the Christian is also a sign of his being alive to God. This is the interpretation Barrett gives to the Christian ethic:

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<sup>28</sup>Barrett, op. cit., pp. 126f.

Because Christ is now hidden from men's eyes in heaven until his parousia, the holiness and righteousness of Christians, which are not their own, but his, are hidden, and the body of sin is all too clearly visible. In the meantime, however, the 'powers of the age to come' could-and-must-be expressed in ethical terms; here indeed was the only visible indication that Christians belonged to the new age.<sup>29</sup>

The life of the Christian is a reflection of the eschatological dimension of our faith. Another way of saying it is, if our lives are rooted in the grace of God, they should bear the fruits of the reign of grace. Paul can refer to this obedient state as the "grace in which we stand." (5:2). The obvious conclusion is: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies . . . but yield yourselves to God . . . ." (6:12f).

#### D. SUMMARY

The expression of grace in the Old Testament is in personal terms. The greatest example in the Old Testament of grace is the choice of Israel as God's servant people. The covenant is a visible sign of God's grace to Israel. Righteousness is an integral part of the Old Testament idea of God's loving-kindness.

In the New Testament we encounter grace in Jesus Christ. Though not worked out theologically in the synoptic literature, grace is basic to the life of Jesus.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 129f.

It was Paul, however, who first thought through the meaning of grace as God's saving deed in Christ. Into man's helpless condition God came and graciously acted to deliver man from his sin. Grace is the free gift of God whereby man is offered standing before him. Into the race of men held solidly together by sin, Jesus Christ came with grace abounding to effect salvation. Grace is for all. But only those who trust God's saving action and thus allow him to act in their lives, receive the benefits of grace. Our works do not effect standing before God. But God's grace received through faith makes us alive to him in such a way that the whole of our life is affected.

Sin is incompatible with grace. To be baptized into Christ is to die to sin and to be united with him in newness of life. The Christian belongs to God and sin is out of place in this new relationship. Baptism unites the believer with the One into whom we have been baptized. In the same way, the obedience of the Christian is a sign that we belong to the One to whom we are obedient. We will now proceed to an appraisal of Tillich's understanding of grace.

## CHAPTER IV

### APPRAISAL OF TILlich'S UNDERSTANDING OF GRACE

The first two chapters have stated objectively the theology and preaching of grace by Paul Tillich. Chapter three provided the normative understanding of grace from the Bible. This chapter will express my reservations and criticisms of Tillich's view of grace. Tillich was always receptive to criticism. In his "Autobiographical Reflections," written at the beginning of a book that critically analysed his theology, Tillich wrote:

The criticism contained in this book shows its [Tillich's theology] limitations; but that it has been judged as worthy of such criticism is honor and joy. And it is the reason for profound gratitude to all those who have worked on it in the spirit of scientific criticism and personal friendship.<sup>1</sup>

The criticisms I give are to be set alongside a profound appreciation for Paul Tillich, the man, the theologian, and the preacher.

If there have been many who disagreed with Tillich, he left no doubt about his intention. As Rollo May said of him in the Memorial Address at the final interment of Dr. Tillich's ashes in May, 1966: "Tillich

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<sup>1</sup>Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, The Theology of Paul Tillich (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 21.

spoke out of our broken culture, but he spoke believing."<sup>2</sup> Tillich gave his life in the pursuit of trying to make the gospel relevant to contemporary man. In making a particularly important statement in one of his sermons, he stated his life's purpose in these words: "I say this to you as somebody who all his life has worked for a true expression of the truth which is the Christ."<sup>3</sup>

There was a fervor about his preaching in such sermons as "You Are Accepted." I feel it as I read his words to the alienated: " . . . You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know . . . Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!" He used the language and symbols he felt would make the gospel relevant to a group that had become critical of the Christian faith as they understood it. He took the apologetic approach rather than the kerygmatic style, believing that the Christian faith could be meaningful only if it provided the answers to the questions man was asking. Correlation as a method was his attempt to synthesize the gospel and the modern mentality. As he wrote:

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<sup>2</sup>Rollo May, "Paul Tillich: In memoriam," Pastoral Psychology, XIX:181 (February 1968), 8.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Tillich, The New Being (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 70.

Since the breakdown of the great synthesis between Christianity and the modern mind as attempted by Schleiermacher, Hegel and the nineteenth-century liberalism, an attitude of weariness has grasped the minds of people who are unable to accept one or the other alternative [rejection of faith or of philosophy]. They are too disappointed to try another synthesis after so many have failed. But there is no choice for us. We must try again!<sup>4</sup>

Few will doubt the necessity of grappling with language and action that tries to communicate the Christian faith in the categories of modern man. P. Watson wrote that words have a history similar to coins. Because of their constant use they become tarnished, and in time grow worn and thin. Just as money values change, so the meaning of words change. He contends this has happened to the word grace.<sup>5</sup> But the essential question is: In this task, is the cutting edge of the gospel dulled? Is the offense of Christianity eliminated? Is the gospel turned into "another gospel"?

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<sup>4</sup>Paul Tillich, Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 57. Kegley and Bretal, op. cit., p. x., saw Tillich's work as an attempt to gather up the strands of all that was best in secular thought, and unite them with the truths of God's self-disclosure.

<sup>5</sup>Philip Watson, The Concept of Grace (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), pp. 5f.

## A. TILLICH'S USE OF LANGUAGE

The obvious place to begin in a criticism of Tillich is his language. He is unmistakably clear at times, and incomprehensible at others. He has made a deliberate attempt to express himself in "an untheological, profane way." He leaves no word untouched in his interpretation of the faith. God becomes the "ground of our being," or the "depths of our life," or the "source of our being," "being itself," "ultimate concern," "hope," etc. Jesus becomes the "New Being." The Spirit becomes the "Spiritual Presence." Sin becomes "estrangement from the ground of being," grace becomes "reunion with the ground of being." Justification by faith through grace becomes "accepting our acceptance though being unacceptable."

There are several reasons for his concern about language. Tillich felt it was necessary to let the true meaning of the Christian faith be heard by the modern mind. He admitted that his use of non-Biblical terms was a relative exercise. He was attempting what all concerned Christians must attempt, to use language that is "transparent" for the grace of God to shine through.

Tillich believed that language could be a "medium of revelation." Language had the power of the "Word of God" when the "voice of the divine mystery" could be heard

in and through the voice of man. As he wrote:

. . . one could say that the Word of God as the word of revelation is transparent language. Something shines (more precisely, sounds) through ordinary language which is the self-manifestation of the depth of being and meaning.<sup>6</sup>

Tillich believed that the language symbols of the faith could be replaced if they lost their power to communicate their original meaning. Part of his task was to use the appropriate language to communicate the gospel.

But it is doubtful if his use of the impersonal "ground of being" is an improvement on the traditional word "God." "The ground of being" needs so much interpreting itself. No word means anything without the experience behind it. If God is a reality in our life, then the word God can become a word which verbally symbolizes this reality. "Reunion" is a descriptive word, but it falls short of grace as Paul uses that word in the New Testament. In chapter 3 we saw that grace pointed to God's saving deed in Christ. When that deed is received in faith, the result is the reunion of man with God. But the primary meaning of the word is its reference to God's action in Christ. The persistent danger in changing the great words of faith, is that their meaning is changed.

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<sup>6</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), I, 124.



The words must remain as normative expressions of the faith. Everything else is an attempt to enliven and interpret them.

Tillich would agree with this. He accepted Reinhold Niebuhr's criticism of his choice of estrangement to reinterpret the word sin. Niebuhr views sin as historical rather than ontological in origin. "In Biblical thought man, who is meant to live in fellowship with God and his fellows, becomes a sinner by making himself his own end."<sup>7</sup> Niebuhr wrote that there was a change of emphasis when the word estrangement replaced the word sin. "The emphasis now falls upon the fatefulness of sin, rather than upon our responsibility."<sup>8</sup>

Tillich accepted Niebuhr's criticism. Tillich himself wrote: " . . . The word 'sin' cannot be overlooked. It expresses what is not implied in the term 'estrangement,' namely, the personal act of turning away from that to which one belongs." Tillich goes on to write that he does not mean the word sin to fall into misuse. It "must be used after it has been reinterpreted religiously."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Kegley and Bretall, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>9</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 227.

One of Tillich's harsher critics, Prof. K. Hamilton, writes: "To see Tillich's system as a whole is to see that it is incompatible with the Christian gospel."<sup>10</sup> His chief criticism of Tillich's language is: "All Tillich's terms must be carefully scrutinized because they gain their meaning more from their relationship to his overall system of theology than from the inherent meaning of the word."<sup>11</sup> The word may mean one thing in its traditional setting, but when Tillich sets it within the orbit of his systematic theology, it takes on the special nuance he gives to it.

Another major reason for the ambiguity in Tillich's language is his merging of the ontological and the theological. Tillich is pulled in two directions. This is the most baffling problem I have with his language. It is hard to improve on the way H. Kraemer has put it:

. . . he (Tillich) lives in the incompatible situation of wanting to be wholeheartedly an ontological philosopher and as wholeheartedly a Christian thinker or theologian. This is impossible . . . Tillich has in his definitions avoided a single-minded decision, and has to pay for this omission by imprisonment in opaqueness.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Hamilton, The System and the Gospel, a Critique of Paul Tillich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 227.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 17, see also pp. 32ff, 197ff.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

At the very place where Tillich wanted to be clear, he is most ambiguous for me.

I do not believe there is any magic involved in the use of the great words of the faith. Nor do I believe anything is gained by bypassing their use. Use them, interpret them, and use them again. It is the reality to which they point that is important. It is the reality they participate in that gives them content and meaning. Tillich would have agreed with this, but it must be said.

Having dealt with Tillich's use of language in a general sense, I want to deal specifically with his use of the word grace. Tillich did not intend to find a "substitute," or to replace the word grace, as at least one of his critics unfairly charged.<sup>13</sup> Tillich suggested the word "reunion" as a word that would serve as a useful clue to "interpreting" the original meaning of the word grace. Grace was the "reunion of the estranged." Grace could also be interpreted by the word "reconciliation." The most frequent interpretative phrase Tillich used for the word grace as we have noted, was the "acceptance of the unacceptable." Tillich saw this as the genuine meaning of "justification by grace through faith."

"Accepting our acceptance" is a warm, inviting phrase. It possesses a loving quality. Grace certainly

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

accepts the unacceptable. "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8). This acceptance speaks to my condition. I have written at some length on the lack of man's sense of worth. The affirmation of man in all his unacceptability is a significant part of the meaning of grace as seen in God's saving deed in Christ.

But the phrase, "acceptance," possesses a passive element that is not present in the word grace. In Oden's thinking,<sup>14</sup> "acceptance means to be open to and to receive the contents of the other's experience." Acceptance might be a "bland relationship," devoid of "love, concern, sympathy, and care." The word "acceptance" lacks the active, out-going, positive, dynamic character of the New Testament use of grace as God's saving deed in Jesus Christ.

#### B. TILLICH'S USE OF THE KERYGMA<sup>15</sup>

This leads me into the second major criticism of Tillich's reinterpretation of the word grace. "Accepting

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<sup>14</sup>Thomas C. Oden, Kerygma and Counselling (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 76.

<sup>15</sup>C. H. Dodd, Gospel and Law (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 9. Dodd maintains that the earliest exponents of the Christian faith worked out a distinctive way of presenting the fundamental convictions of their faith. This formula was called the kerygma, or

our acceptance" is not an adequate phrase to interpret the New Testament reality of justification by grace through faith because it lacks the kerygmatic note of God's saving deed in Christ. Justification by grace through faith states the action of God. This action invites our response. This is a historical act of God embodied in the very heart of the kerygma. "Accepting our acceptance" is the reunion of the estranged by man's participation in the New Being.

Tillich rejects kerygmatic theology when it emphasizes the subjecting of every theology to the criteria of the unchangeable truth of the Christian message as contained in the Bible.<sup>16</sup> This is like throwing stones into the situation. Tillich believed that apologetic

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"the proclamation." The proclamation was the good news or the gospel. Dodd believes "the form and content of the proclamation, the kerygma, can be recovered from the New Testament with reasonable accuracy. It recounted in brief the life and work of Jesus Christ, His conflicts, sufferings and death, and His resurrection from the dead; and it went on to declare that in these events the divinely guided history of Israel through long centuries had reached its climax. God Himself had acted decisively in this way to inaugurate His kingdom upon earth. This was the core of all early Christian preaching; however, it might be elaborated, illustrated, and explained."

<sup>16</sup>Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 4-8.

theology must be "based on the kerygma as the substance and criterion of each of its statements."

On the other hand, "Kerygmatic theology must take seriously the attempt of apologetic theology to answer the questions put before it by the contemporary situation." Tillich wrote about "implied" answers in the Christian message. The task as he saw it, was to "adapt" the Christian message to the modern mind without losing its essential and unique character. It was this "synthesis" Tillich believed kept theology alive.

No one will criticize Tillich for his intention as he has stated it. Anything less than this missionary desire to communicate the Christian faith is a denial of its truth. Every Christian must struggle with creative ways of communicating the faith in the thought forms of his culture. We will bury the gospel in the cemetery for dead languages if we fail to present the Christian message in a lively language. Tillich was led to the apologetic task because he felt this was the only way to bridge the gap between the reality of the Christian message and a segment of mankind that did not understand what it was rejecting.

This is as it should be. It is the burden of my ministry. But to find our authority in anything other than the kerygma is to find one's norm for theology in

something else than the gospel. The authority for the Christian faith is the kerygma. All of our attempts at relevancy must be rooted in this norm. To abandon it is to preach "another gospel"--the danger that constantly pursued Tillich in his standing on the boundary between the ontological and theological interpretation of life.

My own stance is that the kerygma of the Bible keeps theology alive, whether it calls itself kerygmatic or apologetic theology. It is the New Testament kerygma that judges and saves theology and the church. We must each struggle with the meaning of the Bible for today. But not at the expense of the basic historical givenness in the Biblical kerygma. To lose the kerygma is to lose our authority and norm for personal faith.

It is not that Tillich denied the kerygma. My criticism is that it was used as a source book for the answers to man's questions. There is a sense in which we proclaim the kerygma and do not ask that it be relevant, but that man be relevant to the kerygma. That is a part of the meaning of grace. God has acted in Christ for our salvation. Our response is to trust this saving deed, to respond with our life, and to be obedient to it. God's gracious deed was to meet man's greatest need, to deal with his guilt and his inability to stand before God (Romans 1-3). To preach the grace of God in this light is

not to throw the gospel like a stone at man. It is to offer to man God's solution to his dilemma--salvation in Jesus Christ. Man's part is to respond with his whole being and thus to receive the grace of God as a life-giving experience.

Tillich is prepared to lose the authority of the Bible. "The confidence of every creature, its courage to be, is rooted in faith in God as its creative ground."<sup>17</sup> As we look around us, fate seems more likely than providence, Tillich states. The only ground of confidence is in the belief that man's life is ultimately rooted in the ground of being. There is no historical or Biblical authority that creates confidence.<sup>18</sup> Certainty is to be found within the person. Tillich would have been more precise if he had said "he" receives no confidence from a historical or Biblical authority.

As fully as I agree with the necessity of personal faith as man's response to God's grace, I am more convinced than ever that the kerygma is the authoritative basis for this faith. The Spirit of God takes this eschatological event, the substance of the kerygma, and invites my response to receive it as true. The eternal God has acted in a person--Jesus Christ. If I trust his

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., I, 270.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., II, 155.



action, and commit my life to him, my life may become transparent for his grace.

### C. TILlich'S USE OF THE ONTOLOGICAL

This leads me to the third criticism of Tillich's doctrine of grace, as stated in the phrase "accept your acceptance." It is the loss of the personal dimension. It is personal enough when Tillich says: "Accept the fact that you are accepted!" But when he goes on to say that man is able to "accept that he is accepted," because he is "drawn into the power of the New Being in Christ, which makes faith possible," I feel like I need to know a second language.

Again, Tillich is not unaware of this. Just a few months before his own death, Tillich spoke at a memorial service for his friend, Martin Buber. In part he told of a lecture that he had given many years ago. Buber was present in the audience. Tillich was arguing for the replacement of traditional religious language, including the word "God." More acceptable words were needed. When he had concluded his address, Martin Buber arose and attacked Tillich's position. "With great passion, he said that there are some aboriginal words like 'God,' which cannot be replaced at all. He was right and I learned the

lesson."<sup>19</sup> Tillich went on to say that it was Buber's comments that made him re-think his position and enabled him to preach. Certainly in his preaching, the power of his language is a moving experience.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, Tillich had no intention of giving up ontological terminology. He admits "there is no ontological thought in biblical religion," but he is equally as confident that "there is no symbol or no theological concept in it which does not have ontological implications."<sup>21</sup> Unless the potential ontology of the Bible is made actual, theology is reduced to a "repetition and organization of biblical passages." But this is not the only alternative. Tillich so often lays down polarizations like this, when there is another way.

The other way is to preach the kerygma, laying it alongside the human situation as the preacher sees it, and to trust God to empower his Word. I was driven into this dissertation because I felt I was not really trusting God

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Tillich, "Martin Buber--1878-1965," Pastoral Psychology, XVI:156 (September 1965), 52.

<sup>20</sup> Kegley and Bretall, op. cit., p. xi, footnotes. Two examples are given of the practical good Tillich's sermons have accomplished in the lives of people who read and studied them. Undoubtedly these could be multiplied time and again.

<sup>21</sup> Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 12.

in my preaching. It is necessary to state at this point that it is precisely here that the preacher trusts God to honour what he has done in Christ.

Tillich agrees that Being as an abstraction is the emptiest of all concepts. But when it is understood as the power of being in everything that has being, it becomes the most meaningful of all concepts. My only reaction is to say "it still remains an abstraction for me." To describe the Christian's relationship with God as "the state of unity between God and man"<sup>22</sup> is not the same for me as the New Testament word: "I know whom I have believed" (2 Timothy 1:12). Or, "the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20). For me, the personalized language of the Bible is the most adequate way to faithfully and relevantly communicate the Christian faith. Man's need in this increasingly depersonalized society is to know that God loves him. To be told the general truth that Christ established "the state of unity between God and man" is a meaningless collection of words addressed to his desperate personal needs.

It is not that Tillich's universals are untrue. It is that these guideposts need further elaboration in the human situation. It is not that they ignore practical

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., II, 179.

issues needing reconciliation, or that Tillich is ignorant of the personal or practical aspects of grace. It is that when these are presented in relationship to "Being itself," "the ground of being," "the New Being," they become incomprehensible for me.

If Tillich failed to communicate the Christian message to some, if he failed to understand it in certain essential areas, at least he was courageous enough to risk failure, rather than succumb to things as they were. We cannot do less than give ourselves to the missionary task of imaginatively and creatively setting forth the gospel. But always on its own terms. In just such ways, the gospel will do its judging and saving work.

## CHAPTER V

### THE IMPLICATIONS OF GRACE FOR PREACHING

In this concluding chapter I am writing my own personal understanding of grace for preaching. Tillich's influence will be felt most strongly in the relationship between grace and personality. In this chapter I will move beyond Tillich to others who have helped me arrive at my present understanding of grace for preaching.

#### A. AS IT RELATES TO SALVATION

The preacher will make the kerygmatic proclamation that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." (2 Corinthians 5:19). To preach grace is to preach Christ. Salvation is of God. Man is in "bondage to his will." As St. Paul describes the human situation in the first three chapters of the Romans, man is caught in his sin, in need of salvation and helpless to deliver himself. The law cannot effect deliverance. Religion is incapable of rescuing man from his dilemma. But what man's efforts failed to accomplish, God has done in Jesus Christ. God's great act of grace is in the historical fact that "the Son of God . . . loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20).

In our scientific orientation, in a day when man's achievements are moving out into space, this is a

hard word for some. But it is the kerygma of the Christian faith. It is the given of the gospel. We are justified by grace through faith. Whether modern man likes it or not, whether this historical part of the faith is still a scandal or not, this is the Christian message.

As Emil Brunner has written: "The peculiar fact about Christianity--and one which gives great offence--is this: it is absolutely concerned with an external historical fact."<sup>1</sup> But in this gracious action of God man finds his salvation. The offence becomes the source of man's joyous deliverance to be himself and to find standing before God.

The preacher of grace will never tire of proclaiming the good news that God is love. He will regularly affirm the word that God loves each human being as though there were only one to love. It was almost incredible to Paul that God loved him to the point of dying on the cross. When that truth broke into his life the cross became the proof of God's love for every sinner. (Romans 5:8). This amazing love of God was the grace event. Paul was confident that nothing could separate him from God's love. He was always filled with wonder that

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<sup>1</sup>Emil Brunner, The Mediator (London: Lutterworth Press, 1934), pp. 153f.

God loved him and that Christ gave himself for him. With strength and confidence he could write: "By the grace of God I am what I am." (1 Corinthians 15:10).

However difficult it may be for man to accept God's love, it becomes the power of God unto salvation. God loves us and Christ's death on the cross proves it, reasoned Paul. Christ would not compromise the will of God. He would not meet man's hatred with anything less than the love of God. Man's hatred reached its ultimate form in the crucifixion of Christ. But the meaning of the cross for Christ is that love remained love and he conquered. He was obedient unto death and became the triumphant Saviour.

The preacher will take seriously the meaning of the atonement and wrestle with the dynamics of the atonement (or the theories of the atonement). Tillich finds strengths and weaknesses in all the great theories of the atonement. But he recognizes the need to describe "the effect of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ on those who are grasped by it in their state of estrangement."<sup>2</sup>

The Christus Victor (Aulen) theory of the atonement develops the thought of a conquering Christ defeating the demonic forces of evil. Christ is victorious where

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<sup>2</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), II, 170-80.

all men are defeated. The theory of Substitution emphasizes that "Christ died for us." What was impossible for us, He accomplished. Christ's suffering love satisfies the justice of God, and in so doing, is an acceptable substitute that effects man's salvation from ultimate judgment. The truth is in each one of these theories of the atonement, and yet greater than any one.

The preacher will grapple with the dynamics of atonement, albeit he will not claim to be the final authority as to how God effects salvation. But in giving serious thought to this part of the faith, the thoughtful preacher will stress man's salvation is dependent upon God's gracious act in the cross of Christ. Any thought of self-salvation is a travesty on the grace of God as his free gift to men through faith.

The preacher will, nevertheless, not fail to give salvation its personal dimension. Grace is to be received as an act of faith by man. Grace is received as man makes the decision to trust God's gracious action for his salvation. The constitutive and primary fact of grace is the saving deed of God in Christ. This action makes it possible for man to stand before God. But for this to be effective in the life of man the response of faith is necessary. The applied sense of grace, dependent on the primary, is actualized in man as he responds through



faith. The eschatological side of grace is realized in each man's response through faith. Every man in every age has access to the experience of grace through faith.

The preacher will illustrate time and again, the effectiveness of God's salvation in the lives of people. He will tell them of how Wesley's heart was "strangely warmed." He will tell them of Luther's ecstatic discovery of the meaning of justification by grace through faith. He will share the story of his own salvation. It may be an experience with no great dramatic action, but he will communicate to them the reality of his conversion.

In my own life experience, it was the faithful teaching of church school teachers, the sincere preaching of ministers, the warm acceptance of the adult congregation, and the quiet times of reading the Bible. Through these means of grace, my eyes were opened a hundred times by the Spirit of God. I did not understand any of the theories of the atonement, but my heart was "strangely warmed" too. Jesus became Lord for me. As the years have passed by, I have become more convinced that he is the truth of life and eternity.

If a person says "yes" to Christ as his Lord, he will be unafraid to face that to which he is saying "no." The preacher will not set up "straw men," but will honestly state the alternatives. Tillich states the

alternative to salvation is despair. I would prefer to say that the two alternatives are between faith in God and some form of humanism. It may be a humanism of despair and pessimism, a humanism of the "law of the jungle," a warm, loving, moral, life affirming humanism, a materialistic humanism in which a man sells his soul to his work, to success, making money, or it may be hedonistic humanism. But the alternative to faith in God is some form of humanism. Man must make his choice as to which he will trust, and to which he will give himself. The preacher witnesses to the truth he has found in trusting God's grace in Christ.

The preacher will be nurtured in his depths in the Scriptures. It is the witness of the Bible to God's actions in history, and particularly in the person of Jesus Christ, that the church is called into being and continually reformed. Its truths are authoritative for the Christian's faith and life. It is this dependence upon the Scriptures that keeps the church from becoming a mere reflection of the culture in which it exists. If the Bible is not the standard, the only alternative is some form of value system derived from humanism.

The minister will read the Scriptures for the nurture of his own soul. It will always be the basis for his preaching. His sermons will be addressed to some

historical condition but the healing power of grace will be the climax of his message. He will trust God to empower his Word to do its saving work in the midst of life. The congregation will be structured so that it seriously studies the meaning of the Bible. They will wrestle with its teaching on God, man, and the world. The members will probe its pages for light on the meaning of life in an empirical and secular age.

The Bible will be a judgment upon our lives. But the good news at its heart is that God in his grace, loves and accepts us as his children. Unless the Word of the Scriptures is present as an actual experience, the church dies. As the kerygma of the Bible becomes inner experience, the Word becomes life to the Church.

The church will be experienced as the community of those who have responded to God's gracious deed in Christ. As in the New Testament, the church was regarded primarily as a community and a fellowship of people who received Jesus as Lord. They did not "go" to church. They were the church! The church is the sum total of those who are learning and demonstrating the radical acceptance they have received as the grace of God in Christ. The church is not mankind's condemner. The church is, rightly understood, the community that has the highest doctrine of man. The church is the new humanity

in Christ. Christ "has made us (Jew and non-Jew) both one." (Ephesians 2:14).

The minister will be as aware as any of the sins of the church. But he will never be blinded to the prior truth, that is, that "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." (Ephesians 5:25). The church, to use Tillich's phrase, is a "Gestalt of grace." The church does not possess "spatial holiness." The church affirms the unity of the sacred and the secular under the Lordship of Christ. To take any other view tends to make the sacred irrelevant to life, and the secular tends to become secularism. Grace appears in and through the structures of the church. The grace of God is evident in the radical acceptance of the fellowship of the church. But grace is other than and greater than all the forms of the church in which it appears. The grace of God can not be identified with the church in such a way that the church becomes a dispenser of God's grace. Grace is not an object. We can only point to persons and objects and say they are signs of the reality of grace. They are forms through which grace appears.

It is in this way that grace is related to all of life and history. The grace of Christ is operative in the realm of politics through the Christian who is a politician. The grace of Christ is an actuality in the world

of business, because it appears through the Christian whose vocation is as a business man. The grace of Christ appears in the world of medicine, education, family life, and all social groups in this same way. God's grace is not limited to his church, but it calls the church into being, maintains it, and works through it as a means whereby his grace becomes effective in the world. The preacher will always have a profound appreciation for the church of Christ. His congregation should never be in doubt as to his high regard for the church.

It is this estimate of the church that will keep the congregation alive and dynamic. With the centrality of Christ in our doctrine of the church, the congregation is free to experiment in order that God's grace appear through forms that modern man can be apprehended by it.

Our preaching will make it clear that the man who is justified by grace through faith remains a sinner. To be justified by God's grace is in "spite of" our sin and our continuing in sin. As we pointed out in the chapter on the New Testament understanding of grace, to be justified by God does not mean to be made "virtuous." Nor does it mean that we are "treated as though" we were righteous. Justification means to be "acquitted" in God's court. It means to be "constituted" as righteous by God. It means to be "cleared" before God by his own act. It means to

be accepted by God. It is the good news of God's free forgiveness.

Justification by grace through faith says something primarily about God. It is the good news that God accepts us as sinners. He loves us in spite of the fact that we continue to sin. Although sin is out of all place in the life of the Christian, we cannot shake free of its power. What good news it is that God's love is "in spite of" our continuing to sin. To the eternal praise of God, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

Man is not a puppet in his estrangement from God. He is not a puppet under the Lordship of Christ. His freedom is never denied him. There are no automatic changes in his behaviour. Salvation does not mean a magical transformation of the way a person lives. It does not mean divine manipulation of our egos.

On the other hand, when we speak of man's freedom, we must be careful that we do not simply mean self-will. This state of "freedom" may be emancipated from God, but it is hardly a condition that we would describe as being free. It is a situation in which man's will is in bondage to his own whims. He is a victim of evil and not really free at all.

But grace does what man in his "freedom" could not do, namely, enables man to stand before God as a son. God's salvation is experienced in man without loss of human freedom. Faith is not divine coercion of man's powers of will. Rather, faith is the response of man's freedom to God's offer to reunite man with himself, with others and with God. Only as I exercise my freedom in faith can the forces of God's life and love enter my life, and energize me.

An analogy drawn from the life of any minister will illustrate the relationship between God's grace and our free will. I preach a sermon to a congregation on a given Sunday morning. Everyone present hears the same words at the same time. They must listen and reflect and react to these words.

If one of the worshippers wishes to pursue the matter further, an interview is arranged, and we proceed further in the ensuing dialogue. I have a greater opportunity to influence him but only as he receives what I say as valid. I do not infringe on his freedom.

So it is in our relationship to God, even to the prodigal son. He believes that God will accept him, that God loves him, forgives him, wants him to return home and is waiting for him. The experience of untold numbers is that the man who exercises his freedom in faith will find

standing before God. In fact, only as man exercises his freedom and responds through faith, can the grace of God become a "fact" in his life. The gripping feeling that ministers experience so often is being in touch with reality. We are not dealing with the "grace-notes" of life when we call out to man to respond to God's grace through faith. We have an assurance, acknowledging man's freedom, and calling upon him to exercise it, that God's grace is a saving reality in the lives of those who respond through faith.

In a day when an increasing number of ministers are discouraged and troubled about their role, a new understanding of grace would be a redeeming influence. The preacher who believes in the centrality of grace will recognize he is engaged in a "high calling." He would not see his task primarily as an administrator, or as an agitator for justice, nor a dispenser of the Word and Sacraments. Giving each of these its due, he would regard himself as one who has responded to God's grace. He would see his vocation as an ordained minister as his response to this same grace. Believing that God has called the church into being through His saving deed in Christ, the minister stands on the firmest ground ever man stood. As Langdon Gilkey daringly writes: "There is no church without him (the servant of the Word), and



little else therefore that matters. He is in his day the servant of the Lord and truly the hope of the world."<sup>3</sup>

The New Testament cannot be understood apart from its eschatological dimension. The eternal has broken into time, at a certain place, and in a certain person, Jesus Christ. Salvation has a past tense. But it has a present tense whenever men respond through faith. The future tense is the reality to which all else are signs.

The grace of God is declared most fully in three great realities of the Christian faith. There is God's gracious act in the creation of the universe and man. There is the fullest expression of grace in the incarnation, life, and particularly the death of Christ. There is the grace of God in the promise of eternal life. The Christian doctrine of man is that we are more than mere "earth men." We are sons of God, made for communion with him in this life, and in eternity.

To believe in God is to participate here and now in eternal life. But the Christian interpretation of death is that it is the door through which man enters eternal life. The eternal dimension of salvation is the hope of eternal life.

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<sup>3</sup>Langdon Gilkey, How the Church can Minister to the World Without Losing Itself (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 103.

## B. AS IT RELATES TO PERSONALITY

If the grace is good news about God, it is equally good news about man. The premise of this dissertation is that the central message of grace is God's saving deed in Jesus Christ. The gospel is the message of grace. Received in faith, grace is a life-giving and self-affirming message for man. Man can find no greater sense of worth than to experience acceptance by God as a child of God.

Preaching grace as it applies to personality is a hopeful message of man's worth. The preacher will invite men to accept themselves in the context of God's loving acceptance of them in Christ. He will call out to them to possess "the courage to be oneself." He will challenge men to have faith, as Kierkegaard defined that word. "Faith is: that the self in being itself and is willing to be itself is grounded transparently in God."<sup>4</sup> It is my observation of people, whether in the contacts of the parish, or in the reformatory as a chaplain, or in the awareness of my own self image, one of the greatest problems of mankind is his lack of self worth.

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<sup>4</sup>C. R. Stinnette, Jr., Grace and the Searching of our Heart (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 19.

Professor H. Clinebell writes on this subject out of a concern that preaching should strengthen the self-esteem of the worshippers. It has often been said that pride is the major sin of man. The great enemy of man is his inability to think rightly about himself. This gets twisted around so that one of the visible expressions of it is pride. Clinebell sees pride, selfishness and self-idolatry as symptoms of deeper causes--self-hatred, anxiety. Pride "is a frantic defense against the agony of feelings of weakness, vulnerability, and despair . . . The person makes an idol of himself and his powers because he cannot trust anything else," writes Clinebell. This basic inability to accept oneself cuts the person off from the only sources of genuine help, meaningful relationship with others and God. Clinebell continues:

To develop trust, he must experience unearned acceptance which, according to Tillich, will allow him to "accept himself as being accepted." This acceptance is present in every good family, in every effective counselling relationship, and wherever else genuine love is found in relationships. In theological terms, this is the essence of the experience of salvation by grace through faith.<sup>5</sup>

Carl Rogers has written: "If I were to search for the central core of difficulty in people as I have come to know them, it is that in the great majority of cases they

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<sup>5</sup>Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Mental Health Through Christian Community (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), pp. 49-54.

despise themselves, regarding themselves as worthless and unlovable."<sup>6</sup>

In another place he writes of the way this attitude may be overcome.

If I can create a relationship characterized on my part; by a genuineness and transparency, in which I am my real feelings; by a warm acceptance of and liking for the other person as a separate individual; by a sensitive ability to see his world and himself as he sees them; then the other individual in the relationship; will experience and understand aspects of himself which previously he has repressed; will find himself becoming better integrated, more able to function effectively; will become more similar to the person he would like to be; will be more self-directing and self-confident; will become more of a person, more unique and more self-expressive; will be able to cope with the problems of life more adequately and more comfortably.

The obvious response to that often repeated clinical experience of Rogers is, if this takes place countless times between a counsellor and his patient, think of the impact of God's acceptance of man!

The preacher will rejoice that the behavioral sciences are clinically experiencing the reality of what is central to the Christian faith. God's acceptance of us in Christ is an affirmation of the worth of man that will

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<sup>6</sup>Carl Rogers, "Reinhold Niebuhr's The Self and the Dramas of History--a criticism," Pastoral Psychology, IX:85 (June 1958), 17.

<sup>7</sup>P. A. Bertocci, Free Will, Responsibility, and Grace (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 102.

be good news to all who receive it. It is the good news of God's forgiveness and acceptance in spite of our inability to accept ourselves. This does not mean the magical transformation of the sinner into the saint. We are affirmed and accepted in spite of our feelings and our behaviour. The essential person is authentically and genuinely accepted.

The preacher will beware of any tendencies in his message that betray this good news of man's worth and acceptance in God's sight and his own. Professor K. M. Edwards shared in a lecture on "Grace--The Dominant Note in Preaching," that in the preparation of sermons he kept this need before him by writing on three inch by five inch cards such phrases as: "Preach the good news of God," or "Be affirmative," or "Preach hopefully."

But lest acceptance come to mean a watered-down kind of loveless permissiveness, I want to stress the necessity of the preacher relating his understanding of grace to "judgment." By judgment I mean confronting man with the truth about himself. Grace is not blind to the reality of man's behaviour. Acceptance is not ignorant of the "unacceptable." There are times when men need not so much to be comforted as confronted. Men need to be "stripped of their pretensions" if they are to accept themselves as they are. There is no conflict between

grace as acceptance and the element of judgment inherent in the preaching of grace. In fact, the way to learn the meaning of grace as acceptance may be the experience of grace as judgment.

If, as Professor K. Morgan Edwards has stated repeatedly in his lectures: "Grace, judgment and obedience need to be presented in every sermon," the omission of one is to distort the gospel in some way. This is the contention of the theologian, H. Ott. Ott maintains that preaching must show man his true situation in his life and before God. Ott means sin when he speaks of man's true situation. But the preacher will use contemporary language to communicate the meaning of man's true situation. Such words as guilt, homelessness, emptiness, anxiety and meaninglessness, will come readily to the mind of the alert preacher. Ott writes:

In the fact of lovelessness lies human sin. Sin is alienation from God. Man's sin is to be preached in such a way that he is made aware of it personally as his and all men's condition before a gracious God.<sup>8</sup>

The important element in the preaching of judgment is the attitude of the preacher. "Speaking the truth in love" is the key to preaching that lays bare the human situation to the forgiveness of God. A congregation that

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<sup>8</sup>Heinrich Ott, Theology and Preaching (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 141.

is sure their minister loves them will listen to him when he speaks in such a way that their motives and actions come under the judgment of God. It is in the context of genuine love that the preacher will find the freedom to let God's word do its judging and saving work.

If the preacher has experienced grace within his own inner life, it will be transmitted to his hearers. It will be "transparent" in the way Tillich uses that word. Something that is not the minister will shine through him (2 Corinthians 4:6). The grace of God will be transparent in his life. Grace is something other than the preacher, but grace is integral to his personality.

Another way of describing it is, the congregation will be sensitive to the "feeling tone" of the note of judgment in preaching. They will know whether or not their minister is acting as a self-appointed condemner. If he is being judgmental, they will feel his words with the same force as though he were throwing gravel into their faces from the pulpit. They will perceive whether he exempts himself from the preaching of judgment. They will sense it when he throws out mere moralisms. They will note whether he emphasizes the good news of this gracious God who has acted to bridge the gap we have constructed between him and us. The preacher who has experienced grace will constantly concern himself with the

relationship of the feeling-message to the verbal-message. When the two are united, the congregation will more easily listen to what the preacher has to say.

As men are confronted and stripped of their pretensions by the Word, the preacher will face squarely the demonic in man. When man loses God at the center of his life, he must manufacture a substitute. The demonic distortion that takes place is man's claim to holiness as his special possession. Whenever man exalts himself, the preacher will courageously hold their motives and actions up to the saving grace that is the light by which all the works of darkness are judged.

This confrontation of the demonic and grace will be seen in the life of individual persons. We have referred to this in some detail previously. But man's life is lived in various groups and his life introduces the demonic into the larger community of man. Grace judges and exposes the demonic in all of man's institutions. Sometimes the demonic is entrenched in the nation that exalts itself in a false nationalism or assumes the role of a god to its subjects. Sometimes it is the church that becomes the authority of God upon earth, usurping God of his rightful place, and forgetting its role to serve mankind. Sometimes it is the false dichotomy that is created between the secular and the sacred. Not to confront the



demonic with God's grace is to misunderstand the gracious act of God's saving deed in Jesus Christ. God's action was operative at the point of man's greatest need and helplessness--sin. It is only as the preacher fulfills this part of his calling that the demonic can be overcome from above. Only in such a challenge to the demonic in man and his social groups can he know and accept himself as he really is. Only in such a context of grace can he receive a new sense of his worth before God and himself.

The preacher will declare to his people that there is no "ideal personality," as Tillich uses that term. We do not imitate Paul, or Luther, or even Jesus. The grace of God grasps us and our response in faith leads to the development of a unique personality. No one need look out the corner of his eye to see how the next person is acting. We are like the parts of the body, each unique, but related to the whole.

The preacher will be sensitive to the fact that only as people discover who they are, and accept this, can they begin the process of growth as persons. The grace of acceptance helps us to see with increasing clarity who we are and with renewed insight to see what we might become. Carl Rogers puts it this way: "When I accept myself as I

am, then I change . . . We cannot move away from what we are, until we thoroughly accept what we are."<sup>9</sup>

Reference has been made to the "transparency" of the minister as an instrument of God's grace. It is necessary to consider the meaning of transparency as it affects the Christian and the Christian community as a whole. I have already written that the Christian gospel does not aim at producing "ideal personalities," whether they are modelled after Jesus or anyone else. However, grace does introduce the eternal dimension into the life of the one it grasps and in whom it finds the response of faith. Remaining essentially who he is, and remaining a sinner, the person has a new Lord. He has a new center from which all his motives and actions spring. The life of God has entered the believer. Something more than the mere man is at work in his life now. The energy of God is operative in his personality and life.

It is a fragmentary experience in the life of the Christian, and it is anything but complete in the Christian community, but it is a "sign" of the reality that lies behind it. Just as it was noted that the significance of Paul's understanding of Baptism and the Christian ethic is a sign of the eternal dimension of the Christian

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<sup>9</sup>Thomas C. Oden, Kerygma and Counselling (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 65.

faith, so the man in Christ is a sign of the eschatological dimension of faith. The Christian is "transparent" for the grace of God that has grasped him and awakened him to a life of faith. Biography is an inexhaustible source of illustration of individuals whose lives are transparent forms for the grace of God. There are countless congregations that not only announce, but demonstrate that the reunion of man with God, and the union of man with man, and the reconciliation of man's inner conflicts, is a present reality. Only as we have been grasped by grace through faith can we perceive grace at work in the life of individuals and groups.

The preacher will confidently proclaim the enabling power of grace in difficult times. We are more than our own poor self-estimate. We are more than our critics think of us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:37ff). The man who has personally encountered God in his grace, will have his strength supporting him in the midst of every trying situation.

In speaking to a group of psychoanalysts, Tillich pointed to God as the source of man's need for courage in our present day agony. He stated that the great problem of our century is the lack of a belief in the meaning of life, the experience of emptiness, of hopelessness and despair. This was not a neurotic reaction, but an

intensely realistic one. "Life is accepted if meaning in the midst of meaningless is accepted." There is a healing power that can conquer these negative elements. He asks the question: "Where does this courage come from?" Tillich pointed the way past psychological knowledge, to something beyond.<sup>10</sup> Although he did not name God, there would be no doubt in the minds of the psychoanalysts as to Tillich's source of courage.

Tillich writes that it was Martin Luther's personal encounter with God in which he knew himself to be justified by grace through faith, that became the ground of Luther's courage in spite of such great opposition.

Tillich illustrates Luther's courage of confidence by referring to Albrecht Durer's engraving, "Knight, Death, and the Devil." A knight in full armour is riding through a valley, accompanied by the figure of death on one side, the devil on the other. Fearlessly, concentrated, confident, he looks ahead. He is alone but he is not lonely. In this piece of art, Tillich sees "Luther's courage of confidence is personal confidence, derived from a person-to-person encounter with God."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Paul Tillich, "What is Basic in Human Nature," Pastoral Psychology, XIV:131 (February 1963), 20.

<sup>11</sup>Paul Tillich, The Courage to Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), pp. 161f.

Bishop Gerald Kennedy writes: "The restoration of human confidence is a religious thing." In one of his many self-revelations he continues: "My recovery from an unspoken but ever-present despair is to bring myself back to God."<sup>12</sup>

The preacher will proclaim the sufficiency of God's grace. He will not say this lightly or easily. He will not say this without communicating to his people his awareness of the difficult times they are experiencing. But he will herald this triumphant work of grace in the midst of life's batterings.

It is a matter of recorded fact that grace integrates the personality of man. Grace sets in motion the dynamics that contribute to the wholeness of man. The undeniable facts are that sinners have experienced forgiveness, the unworthy have sensed a reaffirmation of their life, the helpless have found strength, those caught up in purposelessness have been grasped by a relationship with the eternal. If men want to explain these facts they must be careful not to explain them away. The only adequate foundation for their existence, Christianity states, is the grace of God. The preacher will sound this note of victory as an essential part of the good news of the

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<sup>12</sup>Gerald Kennedy, For Laymen and Other Martyrs (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 103f.

gospel of grace. In Christ man can experience victory over sin, the demonic, the meaningless, the emptiness, and the loneliness of life.

There is no dichotomy between grace as preached from the pulpit, and grace as experienced in counselling. Counselling is a process where the pastor enters into an accepting relationship with another person. The goal of such conversation is to resolve destructive inner conflicts in the counselee. The acceptance of the person, often in spite of his behaviour, is because he is a human being. The acceptance is a witness to the profounder acceptance of God's love, but it is a genuine acceptance. If the person feels that acceptance, he has the context in which to face and resolve attitudes and motives that have diminished his self-esteem.

In preaching, the preacher witnesses to the reality of this grace. Oden writes:

The good news, Emmanuel, that God is with us and for us, which is the implicit basis of counselling, and is the explicit basis of preaching: . . . When the pastor performs his function as a counsellor, his faith is becoming active in love. Here proclamation and therapy support one another in a total ministry of witness and mission. The love of God to which he witnesses in preaching is recapitulated in an analogous fashion in the empathy of counselling.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Oden, op. cit., p. 17.

In other words, grace is the stance of his life, and it is "transparent," whether in the study or the pulpit, or for that matter, in his home or his recreation. If the minister has been grasped by the grace of God, he has obtained through Christ "access to this grace in which we stand." (Romans 5:2).

### C. AS IT RELATES TO OBEDIENCE

The preacher will ground his call to obedience in man's grateful response to God's gracious action in Jesus Christ. Tillich is insistent that "New Being precedes new acting." He emphasizes the action of God in and through Jesus Christ.

He began an Easter sermon by telling a stirring incident that came out of the famous Nuremburg war crime trials.<sup>14</sup> One of the witnesses told of having lived for a time in a grave in a Jewish graveyard, in Wilna, Poland. Some had escaped from the gas chamber and this was the only place they could hide. During this time he wrote poetry. In one of his poems he described a birth that took place in a nearby grave. A young woman gave birth to a boy. When the new-born child uttered his first cry, the old man prayed: "Great God, hast Thou finally sent

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<sup>14</sup>Paul Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), pp. 164-68.

the Messiah to us? For who else than the Messiah Himself can be born in a grave?" The victorious theme throughout this sermon becomes the affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah, the "new reality." Grace is the sheer gift of God to man in his historical reality, leading to reunion of that which was formerly separated.

Grounding our preaching in the grace of God will save us from a religion derived from the surrounding culture. Only as we are responsive to God's grace in Christ will the eternal dimension grasp and energize us. Otherwise, we will have to choose from several alternative life styles. It may be some form of humanism. It may be selfishness, grudging service, the necessity of "doing our part," or some form of earth-oriented philosophy that may well end in constructive action. To participate obediently in Christ gives the person contact with God. This places our action in its proper perspective--joyful and grateful response to God's grace.

By preaching obedience as a response to God's grace, the preacher will be saved from turning Jesus into the bringer of a new law, as heavy as anything Judaism asked its followers to carry. Preaching obedience as a response to grace is the corrective to works of righteousness. We are not asking primarily for assent to new doctrines, new creeds, new demands. Rather, the preacher is



inviting men to believe in Christ as the life-giver. Our actions become "transparent" for something that is more than a mere sociological phenomenon. Our actions then become our response to God in our midst. As Paul put it in the incomparable words he used to defend his ministry and his actions: "For it is the God who said: 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). To those who believe this great testimony of Paul's there can never be any suggestion that Jesus is the bringer of a new law. Rather, he brings the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God."

The preacher will relate God's grace to the ambiguities of our human situation. The greatest failure of our understanding of grace has been in this area. We have so spiritualized grace that it has made the word meaningless for many. Tillich repeatedly views grace in relationship to the individual, to social groups, and to God. Grace is never a theoretical discussion for Tillich. Grace becomes meaningful in the events of man's daily life. Grace is related to the whole of life and creation.

The preacher will stress the sense of purpose such a view of grace brings into the lives of those who are grasped by it. What an indictment Gibson Winters makes of

many of our congregations when he writes

that many middle-class people come to church in search of the ultimate meaning of life . . . However trivial middle-class religious life may seem, the fundamental thrust is a desperate search for meaning, fullness, purpose, true identity, and freedom from conformist enslavement.

But this is being 'sold short' by the religious life of the major denominations, Winters maintains.

In place of the sacraments, we have the committee meeting; in place of confession, the bazaar, in place of pilgrimage, the dull drive to hear the deadly speaker; in place of community, a collection of functions.<sup>15</sup>

With great eloquence the preacher will declare the purpose men can have by being responsive to God's grace. Their lives can be 'transparent' for the grace of God! My life is no longer a unit bounded by birth on one side and death on the other. It is a part of the will of God become a reality on earth.

The preacher will have the confidence that his last word is not judgment, but the affirmation of man by God's grace. Tillich defines the moral act as "the constitution of the person as person in the encounter with the other person." Based on man's reunion with God, the other person is affirmed in our actions. This was dealt with more fully in the section that dealt with the

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<sup>15</sup>Gibson Winter, The Suburban Captivity of the Churches (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 92.

implications of Tillich's understanding of grace for preaching as it relates to personality. A word is necessary here because if our obedience depersonalizes the other person, then our action is self-defeating. Our action, based on grace, is a reinforcer of the worth of the other person. In Bonhoeffer's term, the man under grace, is the "man existing for others." Grace is never a dehumanizing process. Grace is always an affirmation of the other person when we encounter one another.

The preacher will be caught up in the joy that follows the preaching of grace as the prius of obedience. The true basis for human joy is the result of the reunion of persons who encounter each other in relationship to God. The preacher will declare with Tillich that,

Joy is ours when we relate to things and persons because of what they are and not because of what we can get from them . . . Joy is nothing else than the awareness of our being fulfilled in our true being, in our personal center. And this fulfillment is possible only if we unite ourselves with what others really are. It is reality that gives joy, and reality alone.<sup>16</sup>

The preacher will speak on the joy in gracious obedience because there is such widespread joylessness in so much family, vocational, leisure activity and church work. Joy comes as we act in response to the grace of

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<sup>16</sup>Paul Tillich, The New Being (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), pp. 144-46.

God. Moffatt writes that "joy . . . (is one of) the proofs of grace in human life."<sup>17</sup> Joy is ours as we are truly "transparent" for God's grace. No amount of human activity or striving can manufacture joy. Joy is the by-product of being loved.

The preacher will have a deep appreciation for the church. Tillich reinforces this attitude when he has defined the moral act as an "act in which an individual self-establishes itself as a person . . . within a community of persons,"<sup>18</sup> and when he affirms the ultimate significance of the church is "that here the reunion of man to man is pronounced and confessed and realized, even if in fragments and weaknesses and distortions."<sup>19</sup> Man's reunion is an actual event in the church, though never often enough or deep enough. The preacher will challenge his hearers to discern in their obedience a sign of the presence of the kingdom of God upon earth.

In a short sermon entitled, "The Power of Love,"<sup>20</sup> Tillich told the story of Elsa Brandström. She was the

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<sup>17</sup>James Moffatt, Grace in the New Testament (New York: Long and Smith, 1932), p. 25.

<sup>18</sup>Paul Tillich, Morality and Beyond (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1963), p. 20.

<sup>19</sup>Tillich, The New Being, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 25-29.

daughter of a former Swedish ambassador to Russia. Her compassion was roused to action at the beginning of the First World War when she saw some German prisoners-of-war being driven through the streets on their way to Siberia. She became a nurse and began visiting the prison camps. At twenty-four years of age she began the fight for a more humane treatment of the prisoners. She prevailed against the brutality of the prison guards, cold, hunger and illness. She herself fell ill and was imprisoned.

After the war she began a work for the orphans of German and Russian prisoners of war. With the coming of the Nazis she was forced to leave Germany and came to America. She became the helper of many European refugees. Tillich said they never had a theological conversation. It was unnecessary because "she made God transparent in every moment." "Whenever this kind of love occurs," Tillich concluded his sermon, "we are dwelling in God and God in us." In just this manner the obedient church becomes a sign of the presence of God's kingdom upon earth.

The preacher will declare that the grace of God is not bound to the religious institutions alone. Grace appears in secular forms beyond the organized church. Wherever reunion occurs, grace is at work. This may seem to broaden the base for grace so that it takes in too

great an area. Grace is at work wherever reunion is experienced in our foreign aid programs, groups that seek racial equality, the well-being of the poor, the welfare of the uneducated, and the feeding of the hungry. These are the signs of the presence of the kingdom of God among mankind. The church will discern these signs and name them as signs of the kingdom, the work of God's grace.

Discerning the signs is paramount in a day that some have called "the silence of God." Helmut Thielicke experienced this silence as he ministered to his congregation during those vicious bombings on his beloved country, Germany. In a sermon on "the silence of God," he said to those bewildered people: "Do we not hear the roar of artillery, the tumult of the world and the cries of the dying? But where is the voice of God? . . . There is neither voice nor answer."

He told them that the silence of God was the greatest test of a man's faith. God's silence was not a sign of his indifference. Rather, it shows that we have no claim upon God. God's job is not to forgive us, as though that were a human right.

The kingdom of God is not thrust on us. The grace of God can also be silent. We certainly cannot claim it.

Thielicke ended his sermon by calling on his people to show God their "empty, longing hands." God would "extend

His grace" to those who would pray: "Have mercy upon us."<sup>21</sup> It is in the time of the silence of God, when we wait in faith, that the signs of the kingdom are to a great degree, the source of our assurance.

Having stated the signs of the kingdom in the church and in the secular world, in a time of the silence of God, the preacher will interpret the missionary character of these signs. Obedience that springs from grace is "transparent" of the grace of God and is missionary in character. If our action originates in the grace of God, then it will of necessity have an evangelistic thrust. We must plan creatively, and act in orderly ways, but the grace of God is not organized or manipulated. The creative action of man is to put himself in God's way so that God's grace will have free access through his mind, his plans, and his actions. (2 Corinthians 4:7). The generosity of the Father leads to generosity in those who are receptive to his grace.

Men will observe this, and if it find a reception in their lives, will grasp and transform them too. Thus the grace of God will lead to faith in others. They become instruments of the Gospel in their lives. The

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<sup>21</sup>Helmut Thielicke, The Silence of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 10-21.

grace of God is passed on from one person to another, and from one generation to another.

The preacher will stir up his congregation to demonstrate the reality of God in their lives, so that others may be called to decision. We may need to go further than Tillich suggests, but we must at least go as far as he does. Tillich says the Christian faith makes a missionary impact in three ways. There is the direct missionary way and the indirect cultural way. The third approach, which Tillich favours, is the personal dialogical way. We are not throwing the gospel like stones into the lives of other people.

But our obedience is not some vague indecisive action without a definite aim. It should lead men to consider and decide for or against the gospel. In an address to a group of ministers on Communicating the Gospel, Tillich said:

To communicate the Gospel means putting it before the people so that they are able to decide for or against it. The Christian Gospel is a matter of decision. It is to be accepted or rejected. All that we who communicate this Gospel can do is to make possible a genuine decision.<sup>22</sup>

Grace is the love of God at work in the lives of all who are grasped by faith. Grace is passed on from one

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<sup>22</sup>Paul Tillich, "Communicating the Gospel," Pastoral Psychology, VII:65 (June 1956), 10.



person to another person. We must consider every imaginative undertaking that will allow the grace of God to work through persons to effect the salvation of many.

#### D. SUMMARY

To preach Christ is to preach grace. This means to tell of God's love so amazingly exhibited in the Cross of Christ. Any theory of the atonement emphasizes man's dependence upon God for salvation. Grace has its personal dimension. We must choose Christ or some form of humanism. The importance of the Scriptures and an appreciation for the church are closely related to the reality of grace in our lives. Grace is effective as it encounters the ambiguities of life. Man is not manipulated by grace, but acts out of his freedom. The minister will see his role in a new and vital way. Grace has its eschatological dimension, our hope in eternal life.

In relating the preaching of grace to the area of man's personality, great stress was put on the self-affirming impact of grace. Judgment is integral to the acceptance quality of grace, but the attitude of the preacher is paramount. The demonic distortion of life is faced squarely. The way out is not in some "ideal personality," but in being "transparent" vessels for grace. Persons and groups thus become signs of the reality of

grace. God's grace is sufficient for our most difficult times. God's grace is a fact in the lives of those who receive it through faith. There is a unity between preaching and counselling.

Obedience is seen as man's response to God's grace acting in him. Obedience so conceived, will save man from deriving his values from the surrounding culture. Christ is not the bringer of another law, but the bearer of a new relationship between God and man. Man becomes transparent for God's grace, and thus grace is related to the ambiguities of life. It links us to the purpose of God. Our actions, when conceived as a response to grace, always affirm the persons involved, leading to joy. The importance of the church is seen in that it's actions become signs of the Kingdom of God in our midst. The church must perceive the signs of the Kingdom in the realm of the secular and declare them to be the work of God's grace. The aim of evangelism is to call men to decision for or against Jesus Christ.

Although I have expressed my reservations of Tillich's understanding of grace in chapter four, I wish to end with a word of thanksgiving for his contribution that enlivened modern theological debate and for the benefits I have received from studying his writings. Certainly the grace of God has taken on a conscious centrality in my life it never had before.

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